FROM PILLAR TO POST

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

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"I shall have to borrow some of your manly courage to carry me through."

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LEAVES FROM A LECTURER'S NOTE-BOOK

BY

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE-BOAT ON THE STYX," ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JNO. R. NEILL

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TO
THAT WISE COUNSELLOR
AND STERLING FRIEND
J. HENRY HARPER

PREFATORY NOTE

I could not let these random notes of a delightful experience go forth into the world without expressing in some way my deep appreciation of the valued services rendered me in my ten years of platform work by my friends of the Lyceum Bureaus. In office and in the field they have labored strenuously, often affectionately, and always loyally, on my behalf. But for their interest some of the most cherished experiences of my life would have been beyond my reach. If sometimes in their zeal to keep me busy they have booked me in Winnipeg on Monday night, in New Orleans on Tuesday night, with little side-trips to San Diego, California, and Presque Isle, Maine, on Wednesday and Thursday, not to mention grand finales at Omaha and Key West on Friday and Saturday, I view that sequence rather as a tribute to my agility than as a matter to be unduly captious about. It is a manifestation of a confidence in my powers to overcome the limitations of time and space that I think upon with an expanding head, if not with

a swelling heart, and whether this required annihilation of distance has been wholly agreeable or not it has enabled me to see more of my own country than I otherwise could have seen, and to that extent, I hope, has made a better American of me.

Wherefore before beginning our ramble from Pillar to Post I record here in testimony of my gratitude to them the names of Arthur C. Coit, and Louis J. Alber, of the Coit Lyceum Bureau of Cleveland, Ohio; of Frank A. Morgan, of the Mutual Lyceum Bureau, of Chicago; of Kenneth M. White, of the White Entertainment Bureau of Boston; of S. Russell Bridges, of the Alkahest Lyceum System of Atlanta, Georgia; of J. B. Pond, Jr., and that tried friend both in the Lyceum field and out of it, William C. Glass, of the J. B. Pond Lyceum Bureau of New York.

Thanks are due to the publishers of *Every Week* for courtesies extended, and finally I desire to inscribe a word of affectionate esteem for my friends, J. Thomson Willing, and that inspiring editorial guide and mentor, William A. Taylor, of the Associated Sunday Magazines, under whose genial direction these papers were first presented to the public.

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS.

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FROM PILLAR TO POST

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I

GETTING USED TO IT

"I CANNOT imagine a more disagreeable way of qualifying for the income tax," said one of America's most noted after-dinner speakers to me when at a chance meeting he and I were discussing the joys and woes of the lecture platform. I must admit that in a way I sympathized with him; for I knew something of the sufferings endured for days and nights prior to one's own public appearance as an after-dinner or platform speaker.

There was a time many years ago, upon which I look back with wonder that I ever came through it without nervous prostration, when I suffered those selfsame mental agonies as the hour approached for the fulfilment of one of those rash promises which men fond of the sound of their

own voices make months in advance to those subtle flatterers who would lure them from the easy solitudes of silence into the uneasy limelight of after-dinner oratory. Not without reason has a certain wit, whose name is unfortunately lost to fame, referred to the chairs behind the guest table on the raised platform at revelries of this nature as " The Seats of the Mighty and Miserable."

These sufferings involve a loss of appetite for days in advance of the event; a complete derangement of the nervous system, with no chance of recovery for at least ten days preceding the emergent hour, since sleep either refuses to come to one's relief altogether, or coming brings in its train a species of nerve-racking dream which leaves the last estate of the weary slumberer worse than the first. The complication is far more difficult to handle than that involved in the maturity of a promissory note which one is unable to meet; for there are conditions under which a tender-hearted creditor will permit a renewal of the latter sort of obligation, and this thought provides some sort of rift in the cloud of a debtor's despair.

But in the matter of public speaking there is no such comforting possibility. Nothing short of

inglorious flight, painful accident, or serious illness, can save the signer of that promissory note for twenty-five hundred personally conducted after-dinner words from being called upon to pay in full the moment the note falls due. He can't even plead to be permitted the payment of one paragraph on account, and the balance in thirty days.

The contract can neither be evaded, postponed, nor sublet. It is then or never with him, and while no great harm would come to the world if ninety-nine and seven-eighths per cent. of the after-dinner speeches of the ages had gone unspoken, no man of the right, forward-looking, upstanding sort, whether his speeches be good, bad, or, like the most of them, merely indifferent, may wilfully or comfortably permit a promise of that nature to go to protest.

Yes, I sympathized with that excellent gentleman. I have known him to take to his bed three days before the ordeal, tremblingly approach the banquet board, rise to his feet, his nerves taut as a G string, his knees quaking in the merciful seclusion of the regions under the table, and then, with hardly a glimmering of consciousness of what he was doing or saying, his whole being thrilled with

terror, acquit himself brilliantly, to return home at the conclusion of his trial physically and nervously prostrated.

One of the happiest recollections of my platform work, nevertheless, had to do with just such a shivering, quivering condition. It was many years ago — back in the mid-'90's of the last century, that so-called crazy end-of-the-century period, which inspired Max Nordau's depressing treatise on Degeneracy, and yet now seems so gloriously sane in contrast to what is going on in the world at the present time.

In some mysterious fashion I had succeeded in writing what the literary world is pleased to term a "best seller," and was in consequence enjoying a taste of that notoriety which inexperienced youth so often confounds with immortality. One result was a tolerably persistent demand that I exhibit myself at one of those then popular functions known as Authors' Readings. This was a form of entertainment almost as barbarically cruel as those ancient ceremonies in which Christian martyrs were thrown into an arena to demonstrate their powers in combatting irritated tigers, and

such other blood-thirsty beasts of the jungle as the ingenious fancy of the management might suggest. It was, in a manner of speaking, a sort of Literary Hagenbeck Show, whither the curious among the readers of the day were lured in sweet Charity's name by the promise of a personal performance by real literary lions, with an occasional wild goose or two wearing temporarily the gorgeous plumage of the Birds of Parnassus, thrown in to make the program longer.

Invited to take part in one of these affairs, and feeling that for posterity's sake it was my duty to rivet my firm grasp upon Fame by keeping such company as my remotest great-grandchild could wish to have me known by, I carelessly accepted as if it were easy to comply, and all in the day's work of a new sun dawning upon the horizon of letters.

But when the fateful evening arrived a " change came o'er the spirit of my dream." Two dread situations arose which bade fair to drive me either into the nearest sanatorium, or to the obscurity of the deepest available jungle. Had I yielded to my immediate impulse, I should have flown as far afield as the Virginia negro who, upon being advised to

leave town lest he suffer certain extreme penalties for his misdeeds, replied that he was "gwine, an' gwine so fur it 'll cost nine dollars to send a postal card back."

On one side of the curtain at the great metropolitan hall where the Readings were to be held sat nearly three thousand hungry readers, waiting to see six unhappy authors prove whether or no they could read their own productions and survive; and on the other side of the curtain were five real Immortals and my sorely agitated self. My fellow sufferers that night were Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell, Dr. Henry Van Dyke, William Dean Howells, the lamented Frank R. Stockton, and the ever unforgettable Mrs. Julia Ward Howe.

It was rather godlike company for a mere mortal like myself, and as I gazed upon them I realized, perhaps for the first time, the magnificent distances that lie between Yonkers-on-Hudson and Parnassus-by-Helicon. Frozen from heel to toe by the thought of having to appear before so vast and critical an audience, the complete refrigeration of my nervous system was accomplished by the thought of even temporary association with those fixed stars in the firmament of American Letters.

Instead of a burning torch on the heights of Olympus, I felt myself more of a possible cinder in the public eye. One might be willing to appear before a Court of Literary Justice in the company of any one of them, but to assume equality with five such household words all at once, and especially before an audience many of whose members had from time immemorial known me as "Johnny"—well, to speak with frankness, it got on my nerves.

My condition was like that foreshadowed by a good old neighbor of mine up on the coast of Maine, who when I asked him one morning if he ever felt nervous when the thunder was roaring, and the lightning was striking viciously, replied, "No, I hain't never felt nervous: *I 'm jest plain dam skeert to death!*" If the exits from the stage had not been guarded, I should have fled; but there was no escape, and while I awaited my turn to go out upon the platform I paced the back of the stage, concealed from the public gaze by a drop scene, shaking from head to foot with a nervous chill. I can scarcely even now bring myself to believe that there was a seismograph anywhere between the northern and southern poles so callous as to fail to register my vibrations.

It became evident as the moment approached that I should be utterly unable to go out upon the platform and do anything but dance: not after the graceful manner of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon Castle, but of Saint Vitus himself. To have held a book, even so light a one as my own, in my shaking hand would have been physically impossible, and then, just as I was about to seek out the chairman of the committee of arrangements, and plead a sudden stroke of some sort, I felt a womanly arm thrust through my own, and a soft white hand was laid gently and soothingly upon my wrist. I glanced to my side, and there stood Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, her lovely eyes full of sympathy, touched with a joyous reassuring twinkle.

"Oh, Mr. Bangs," said she, with a slight catch and tremor in her voice, "do you know I am so nervous about going out before all those people tonight that I really believe I shall have to borrow some of your manly courage and strength to carry me through!"

A marvelous transformation of nervous attitude was the immediate result, a determination to rush to the aid of a lady flying a signal of distress summoning all my latent courage to her cause. A

realization of the lovely tactfulness of her approach and its true significance, and the prompt response of my sense of humor, not yet quite dead, to the exact facts of the situation, made a man of me for the time being — a man who would dare the undarable, attempt the unattainable, and if need be, as the eloquent African preacher once observed, "onscrew the onscrutable." Nervousness, cowardice, muscular vibrations, and all disappeared like the mists of the night before the radiance of the dawn in the face of that gracious woman's tactful humor, and later on I went forth to my doom so brazenly, and smiling so confidently, that one critic in the next morning's newspaper intimated without much subtlety of phrasing that I enjoyed myself far more than my audience did.

It would be too much to say that Mrs. Howe's timely intervention on my behalf effected a permanent cure of my nervousness in platform work; but it has helped me much to overcome it; for many a time since, when through sheer weariness, or for some purely psychological reason, I have approached my work with uneasy forebodings, the memory of that delightful incident has come back to me, and I have invariably found relief from my

fears in the smile which it never fails to bring to my lips, and to my spirit as well.

I do not know that it would be a good thing for any public speaker ever to approach the emergent hour with entire assurance and utterly calloused nerves. Such a condition might well bespeak an indifference to the work in hand which would result either in a purely mechanical delivery, or one so careless as to destroy the effect of the lecturer's most valuable asset — a sympathetic personality. I recall far back in my college days, in the early '80's of the last century, meeting at one of my fraternity conventions that inspiring publicist, the late Senator Frye of Maine. In the course of a pleasant chat, having myself to appear before the convention with a committee report the following morning, and feeling a trifle uncertain as to how I was going to "come through," I asked the senator if he was ever a victim to nervousness when making a public address, and his answer was very suggestive.

"Always, my lad," said he, "always! I have been making public speeches off and on now for twenty-five or thirty years, and even to-day when I rise up to speak in the United States Senate,

or on the stump, my knees shake a little under me. And I 'm glad they do, Son," he went on significantly; " for if they did n't, I should begin to feel that the days of my usefulness were over, for it would mean that I really did n't care whether I got through safely or not."

So it was that up to a certain point I sympathized with my friend the distinguished after-dinner speaker when he intimated that the lecture platform was no bed of roses. For one of his nervous organization and temperament it would be impossible. It would make a nervous wreck of him in a short while, and in the end would shorten his life, even as it has shortened the span of many another robust spirit; such as the late Alfred Tennyson Dickens, for instance, who in very truth succumbed to the exactions of travel and of a lovely hospitality that he knew not how to resist.

But for myself there is so much in the work that is inspiring, so much that is pleasing in the human relationships it makes possible, that but for the discomforts of travel I could really feed upon it spiritually, and seek no happier diet. I defy any man to be a pessimist on the subject of American character after a season or two on the lecture

platform; provided of course that he is a reasonably sympathetic man, and is so constituted in matters social that he is what the politicians call a "good mixer."

To the man who is not interested in the human animal, and insists upon judging all men by his own rigid and narrow standards, measuring souls by a yardstick, as it were, the work can never be a joy; but if he is broad enough to take people as he finds them, looking for the good that lies inherent in every human being, and judging them by the measure of their capacity to become what they were designed to be, and are honestly trying to be, then he will find it full of a living and a loving interest almost equal to that of the "joy forever."

Pasted in my spiritual hat is a little rime by one whose name modesty forbids my mentioning, running:

> I can't be what Shakespeare was,
> I can't do what great folks does;
> But, by Ginger, I can be
> ME!
> And among the folks that love me
> Nothin' more's expected of me.

The wandering platform speaker who will heed the intimations of that little rime, and seize the friendships in kind that surely await his coming in all parts of this great, genial country of ours, will find a wondrous store of happiness ready to his hand. If in addition to this he will cultivate the habit of looking for good in unpromising places, and of resolutely refusing to admit the power of small irritations to destroy his peace of mind, he will get along nicely. The latter of course requires resolution of a kind that is persistent in the face of unremitting annoyances. To say that these annoyances do not exist would be idle; but not half so idle as the act of giving them controlling importance in the making or the unmaking of a day's happiness.

The sooner one who travels the Platform Path learns to suspend judgment as to his fellow beings, and to suspect the fallacy of the obvious, the better it will be for him, and for his personal comfort. The first conspicuous lesson I had in this particular was out in Arizona on my first extended tour in our wonderful West in 1906. I found myself one afternoon on my way from Los Angeles to Phœnix. After having satisfied the inner man

with an excellent Fred Harvey luncheon — an edible oasis always in a desert of indigestibility — I had retired to the smoking car for that spiritual refreshment which comes from watching the smoke wreaths curl upward from the end of a good cigar.

Unhappily for the quality of that refreshment, I was no sooner seated in the smoking room that I perceived that I was surrounded by men who, judging by surface indications, were hopeless vulgarians. Among them were three especially whose conversation was even lower than their brows. I think I can best describe their conversation by saying that in all probability Boccaccio's lady companions out Fiesole way, at the time of the plague that drove the Florentine Four Hundred beyond the city limits, would have fled blushingly before it, taking refuge by preference in the pure, undefiled Rolloisms of the Decameron itself; while poor old Rabelais, not always a master of reticence in things better left unsaid, would, I am sure, have joined a literary branch of the I. W. W. in sheer rebellion, rather than sully the refinement of his pen by taking down any part of it.

One has to listen to a great deal of this sort of thing en route, and pending the discovery of some

kind of vocal silencer that shall render such communications as noiseless as they are corrupting to good manners, or a portable muffler which the unwilling listener may place over his ears, the wandering platform performer who has not yet reached a point where he can give up his cigar and be happy must needs endure them. Indeed he is doing well if he is not lured into a shamefacd enjoyment of such talk; for it must be admitted that some of the traveling companions one meets thus by chance have rare powers as story-tellers, and pour forth at times most objectionable periods with a smiling enthusiasm almost fetching enough to tempt a Simeon Stylites down from the top of his pillar into the lower regions of their alluring good fellowship.

Neither a prig nor a prude am I; but on this particular occasion the gross results of the conversation were so very gross as to preclude the possibility of there being any "net proceeds" of value, and I fled.

On returning to my place in the sleeper I noticed in the section directly across the aisle a handsome Englishwoman, traveling with no other companion than a little daughter, a child of about

three and a half years of happy, bubbling youth. The little one was seated on her mother's lap, and was enjoying a " let 's pretend " drive across country, using the maternal lorgnette chain in lieu of the ribbons wherewith to guide her imaginary steeds.

An hour passed, when a boisterous laugh from the rear of the car indicated the approach of the three barbarians of the smoker, who to my disgust a moment later settled themselves in the section directly in front of mine, and to my dismay began apparently to take a greater interest in the lady across the aisle than the ordinary usages of polite human intercourse warranted, lacking a formal introduction.

I have never posed as a Squire of Dames, and I have a wholesome distaste for such troubles as an unseeing eye enables a man to avoid; but the intrusion of these Goths, not to say Vandals, upon the lady's right to travel unmolested was so obvious that I could n't help seeing and inwardly resenting it. The woman herself treated the situation with becoming coolness and dignity, showing only by a slight change of color, and now and then a vexed biting of the lips, that she noticed it at all;

but the cooler she became the more strenuous became the efforts of the barbarians to "scrape an acquaintance."

I held an inward debate with myself as to my duty in the premises. I did not care to get into a row; but the ogling soon became so pronounced that it really seemed necessary to interfere. I reached out my hand to ring for such reinforcements as the porter and the conductor might be able to bring to our assistance, when to my astonishment the worst offender of the three rose from his seat, and stepped quickly to the lady's side — and then there was revealed to me the marvelous wisdom of the old injunction, "Judge not, that ye be not judged"; for the supposed ruffian, whom I would a moment before have willingly, and with seeming justification, thrown bodily from the train, with the manner of a Chesterfield in the rough lifted his hat and spoke.

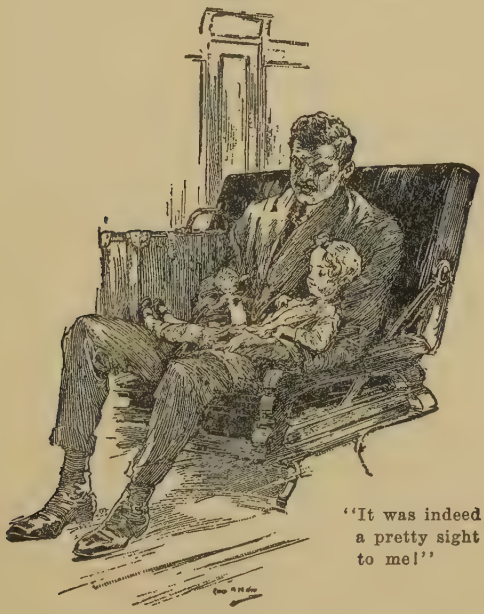
"You will excuse me for speaking to you, ma'am," he said, and there was a wistful smile on his lips and a tenderness in his eye worthy of a seemingly better cause, "but I 'm — I 'm what they call a drummer, a traveling man, and I 've been away from home for three months. I 've got

a little girl of my own at home about the same age as this kid of yours, and I tell you, ma'am, you 'd ease off an awful case of homesickness if you 'd let me play with the little lady just for a few minutes."

The mother's heart seemed to go right out to him, as did mine also. She smiled graciously, and handed over her little daughter to the tender mercies of that group whose presence I had fled only a short while before — and for the rest of the afternoon that Pullman sleeper was transformed into a particularly bright and joyous nursery that echoed and reëchoed to the merry laughter of happy childhood.

If there is an animal of any kind in the zoos of commerce that those men did not impersonate during the next two or three hours I do not know its name, the especially objectionable barbarian transforming himself instantly on demand into an elephant, a yak, a roaring lion, a tiger, or a leopard changing its spots as actively as a flea, and all with a graceful facility that Proteus himself might well have envied. And later, when night fell, and weariness came with it, in the dusk of the twilight it was indeed a pretty sight to me, and a

sight that smote somewhat upon my conscience for my over-ready contempt of the earlier afternoon, when my gaze fell upon the figure of an ex-



"It was indeed a pretty sight to me!"

hausted drummer, his eyes half-closed, sleepily humming a tender lullaby to a tired little golden-haired stranger who lay cuddled up in his arms, fast asleep, with her head upon his breast.

I like to think that that little incident was a

valuable contribution to my education in the science of brotherhood. It has not perhaps produced in my soul a larger tolerance of the intolerable in casual conversation, but it has served to warn me against the dangers of snap judgments, and has certainly broadened my sympathies in respect to my fellow man in my chance meetings with him upon the highways and byways of life, whence sometimes, in the loneliness of my wanderings, I have gathered much comfort, and reaped harvests in friendliness which otherwise I might have lost.

II

SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY

IN traveling about the country, and especially in the South, I have been impressed with the wisdom of the character in Owen Wister's delightful story of "The Virginian," who when another man applied an unspeakable name to him leveled a revolver in the speaker's face, and said, "When you call me that, say it with a smile!" (I quote from memory.) A moment on the road is made cheerful or difficult by the manner in which things are said, and the wanderer's homesickness is either relieved or deepened by the manner of a chance remark, which brings cheer if it be smiling, and a deeper sense of loneliness if it be otherwise.

Throughout the South I have never felt quite so far away from home as in some parts of New England less than a hundred miles from my own rooftree, and I think that this is due largely to the positive effort on the part of the average

Southern man or woman to maintain the traditional courtesy and hospitality of the South toward the stranger within its gates. It is only semi-occasionally that one finds in some sour-natured relic of other days any other attitude than that of smiling welcome, and even with the thermometer ranging close to the zero mark I have learned why the Southland is in spirit anyhow the "Land of Roses."

It must be admitted, however, that when the departure from the attitude of cordiality is made it is done thoroughly, and with a sort of reckless truculence which the wary traveler will be wise to ascribe solely to its individual source.

In the winter and spring of 1913 there was a great deal of work cut out for me in the Southern territory, and during my travels there, which involved the crossing and recrossing of every State in the section except Kentucky, from the Atlantic coast to the Mexican border, I encountered much in the way of human experience that is delightful to remember, and very little that I would rather forget. It was upon this trip that two incidents occurred which showed very clearly the difference between a cutting retort smilingly administered

and that other kind of peculiarly rasping repartee, born of a soured nature that has confirmed its acid qualities by pickling itself in a mixture of equal parts of gloomy self-sympathy over fancied wrongs, and — well, not grape juice.

There is a kind of tonic dispensed in certain of our prohibition States by licensed drugstores and carried by suffering patients in small black bottles, secreted in their hip pockets, like deadly weapons — which indeed they are (whence, possibly, we get the term "hipped" as descriptive of the ailment of the sufferer) — which does not exactly mellow the disposition of the consumer, whatever glow it may impart to his countenance.

One morning I found myself on my way from Natchitoches, in Louisiana, a lovely survival of a picturesque old French trading post, a perfect home of roses, both human and floral, which will ever remain a garden spot in my memory, to Shreveport. It was in the middle of May, and the whole country was a delight to the eye, with its lovely greens and lush spring coloring. I was returning from a lecture before the State Normal School, and while sitting in the smoking car enjoying my weed was introduced to a gentleman (I

use the word carelessly, and without positive conviction) whom everybody had been calling "Judge." I am glad to say that I did not catch his last name. I do not even know whether or not he was really a judge, or, if he were, what he was a judge of. He reminded me more of the judges I have read of in fictional humor than any I have ever seen on the bench, and from his general attitude toward his fellows on the train I gained a tolerably clean-cut impression that he tried his "cases" in solitary state, rather than in that more open fashion which is such a bad example to the young, and productive of that ruinously extravagant disease known as "treating." I may be doing the man an injustice, but I am none the less trying to sketch him as I saw him. He had the manner and manners of the solitary reveler, and the generally "oily," but not suave, quality of his makeup confirmed my impression that any love of temperance he might manifest was purely academic, or, as one of our leading statesmen might put it, "largely psychological." Desirous of starting things along pleasantly after my introduction to the judge, I remarked upon the marvelous beauty of the country.

"Everything is beautifully green about here," I said. "It is a positive pleasure to look out on those lovely fields."

"Glad you like 'em," said the judge, helping himself to a generous mouthful of tobacco.

"Well, you see," said I, "I come from Maine, Judge, and I am particularly fond of the spring, and we don't get ours until late. I guess," I added, "that in respect to that we are about a month and a half behind you people down here."

"Yes," said he explosively, "*and, by God! you are fifty years behind us in every other respect!*"

It was a kindly and tactful remark, and I was duly edified. If he had said it smilingly, I should have been happier, and would have been inclined to enter upon a half-hour of jovial banter on the subject of the respective merits of our several States; but there was a truculent self-confidence about his honor's "atmosphere" that foreshadowed little in the way of a satisfactory issue had I ventured to carry the discussion further. I simply withdrew within myself, like a turtle, finished my cigar in silence, and returned to my seat in the chair car, convinced that in whatever line of action the judge was really an expert — law, his-

tory, economics, or what-not — he at least knew how to put a cork in a bottle, and jam it in so tight that nothing could get out of it — I being the bottle.

"Yes, and you are fifty years behind us in every other respect!"

As I sat for the rest of my journey in that chair car my mind reverted to another incident that had occurred two months earlier. The inviting causes were similar; but the party of the second part was a very different sort of individual. The judge was said to be prosperous, the owner of many acres

of fertile sugar land, and had, or so I was informed, a professional income of fifteen thousand dollars a year. One would think he could have afforded to be genial under such conditions. The other was a man bent and broken under the stress of his years and his trials, coming home, after a lifetime of failure, to pass his remaining days, manifestly few in number, amid the scenes of his youth. What few locks were left him were gray, and he limped painfully when he walked. He had served on the Confederate side during the war, and still carried with him the evidences of sacrifice.

I met him on the railway platform at a little junction town in Southern Tennessee. I was en route to a small college town in Upper Mississippi. We had had a long and tedious wait upon the fast decaying station platform, hoping almost against hope that at least day before yesterday's train would come along and pick us up, whatever might be the fate of the special combination of wheezy engine and spring-halted cars due that morning. As I nervously paced the dragging hours away I noticed this old fellow limping anxiously about, making over and over again of everybody he met

the same inquiry as to the probable arrival or non-arrival of our train; and now and then he would hobble with difficulty over to a small soap box, with a slatted top, which stood just outside the baggage room, in which there was imprisoned a poor, shivering, and I fancy hungry, little fox terrier, whining to be let out.

"Never mind, Bobby," the old man would whisper through the slatted top of the box. "'Taint gwine to be much longer now. We 'll be home soon."

The kindly attitude of the old man toward the unhappy little animal touched me more deeply than his own poverty-stricken condition, and so, yielding to a friendly impulse, I stood by him for a moment and spoke to him.

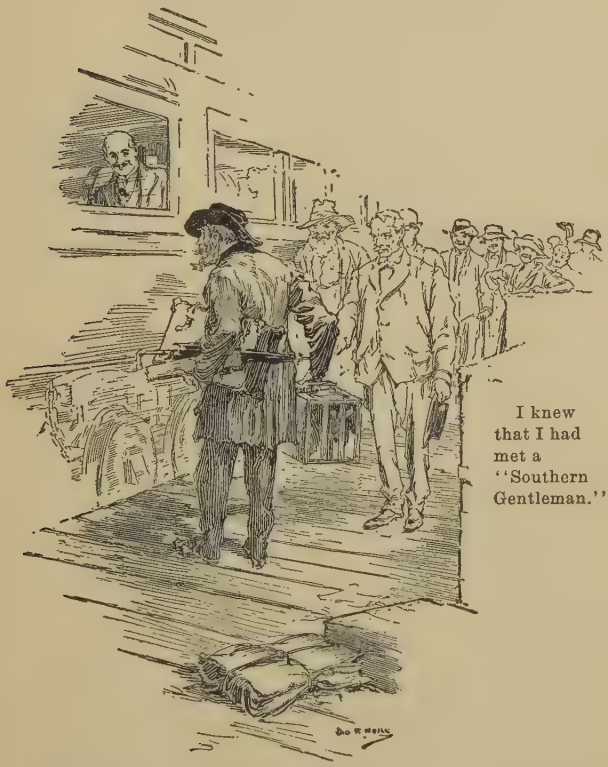
"It 's a long wait," said I.

"Oh, well," he said cheerfully, straightening himself up stiffly, "it 's so near the end I ain't complainin'. I been waitin' fohty yeahs for this, Brother."

"Forty years?" I repeated.

"Yes, suh," he replied, "fohty long yeahs, suh. I ain't been home since the end o' the wah, suh. An' now I 'm comin' back, an' I reckon after I git

thar thar ain't a gwine to be but one mo' journey, suh, befo' I 'm through."



I knew that I had met a "Southern Gentleman."

"You mean —" I began.

"I 'm comin' home to die, suh," he said. "Not that I 'm a gwine to be in any hurry to do it,"

he added, with a winning smile, "but I 'm tiahed o' wanderin', an' what 's left o' my time hyah, suh, 'll pass mo' pleasantly back among the old scenes."

I endeavored to cover up my emotions by offering the old man a cigar.

"I thank you, suh," he said, taking it. "I 'm very fond of a good seegyar, though I don't git 'em any too often, suh. Are you a Tennessee man, suh?"

"No," said I. "I come from Maine. That 's a good way from here."

And then it came. The old fellow gave a great chuckle, and reached out his hand and seized me by mine.

"I want to shake your hand, suh," he said with rare cordiality. "*The last time I see a Maine man, suh, was durin' the wah, an' I was chasin' him with a gun. He was a darned good runner; but I ketched him, an' I 'm glad I did, fo' he was a dam sight better feller than he was a runner!*"

I must confess that when later in the day I saw the old gentleman get off the train in the midst of a welcoming multitude of old friends, with his battered old suitcase in one hand, and the slatted soap box containing the yelping Bobby in the

other — all his earthly possessions — I was glad to feel that he had come "home"; and as he waved a feeble but courteous adieu to me from the platform as the train drew out I knew that I had met a Southern gentleman of a peculiarly true and lovable sort.

One finds much in these little jaunts in the Southland to appeal to one's sense of humor; but after all there is much more that appeals to one's sympathies. I had the pleasure of riding once in Louisiana on a train in company with an old Confederate soldier, who made me as completely his prisoner in the shackles of affectionate regard as he might, because of his powerful build, have made me a prisoner in fact had we met face to face on the field of battle. He was a man of convictions; but he was always so thoroughly the honest-hearted gentleman in presenting his points of view that, although we differed radically upon almost every matter of present political interest, I found for the moment, anyhow, a sweet reasonableness in his principles. His manner was so calm, and gracious, and transparently sincere, that I found him wholly captivating.

His chance remark that he hoped to attend the

great Confederate reunion shortly to be held at Chattanooga, or Chattanoogy, as he called it (there is always a soft, caressing accent in the real Southerner's discourse that changes a mere word or name into a term of endearment), naturally brought up a reference to the great conflict, and I took a certain amount of human pleasure out of the old man's present content with the general situation, as shown in the naïve statement with which he began to talk on the subject.

"You know, suh," said he, "I feel pretty well satisfied with the way things turned out, even though at the time, suh, I did n't want 'em to turn out just that a-way."

"We are undoubtedly stronger as a nation today than if it had turned out differently," I ventured.

"Yes, suh," he said. "If we 'd got away, suh, it would n't ha' been long befo' the principle o' the right o' secession havin' been established, we 'd all ha' been secedin' from each othah, suh; and after the States had done all the secedin' they could the parishes would ha' begun secedin' from the States; an' the towns would ha' seceded from the parishes

— until the whole damn country would ha' landed in Mexico!"

"I never thought of it in that light before," I smiled; "but I guess you 're right."

"An' that ain't all, neither, suh," he went on. "I 'd ha' felt a great sight worse about it if we 'd been licked, suh. If we 'd been licked in that great fight, suh, I don't think I 'd evah have got ovah it, suh."

I maintained a discreet silence; for I could not but feel that I was on the verge of a great philosophical discovery.

"When a fellah 's licked, suh," the old man went on, "he just natcherly kain't help feelin' sore, suh; *but if he 's merely ovahpowahed, suh — why that 's very different.*"

There may be minds to which that distinction is too subtle to be either obvious or convincing; but the more I have thought it over since the more has it seemed to me to involve a profound philosophy which would make the world happier were it more widely accepted by those suffering from reverses of fortune. To me there was a whole sermon in that brief utterance, and the difference between being "licked" and being "merely overpowered"

has been one out of which I have derived no end of comfort myself in hours of difficulty. To be whipped is one thing; to be merely overcome is indeed another!

Nor was the old man's kindly feeling concerning the God of Things as They Are, as expressed in words, mere lip service; for in the course of our morning's chat other things developed which I am glad enough to put upon record for Northern eyes.

"I wish," said he, "that you might stay ovah hyah at my home a day or two, suh, and let me take you to one of our Post meetin's, suh. We 'd make you more than welcome."

"Yank though I be, eh?" I laughed.

"Yes, indeed, suh," he replied. "We ain't got anything against you on that score, suh. My first meetin' with Yanks in a not strictly fightin' capacity was once when a half a dozen of 'em took me prisoner. I found myself surrounded by 'em one day durin' the wah when I was doin' picket duty, and the way they run me in was a caution, suh. They bein' six to one, I just let on that I was satisfied if they was."

"And what did they do to you?" I asked.

"They near killed me, suh, with seegyars, and

mo' real food than I 'd seen in six months," he said with a chuckle. "The' was n't anything they had, from plug tobacker and seegyars up to a real meat dinner that I did n't git mo' 'n my faiah share of."

"And how long did they keep you?" I queried.

"Fo' as long as I was willin' to stay, suh," was his reply. "The minute they see I was beginnin' to feel oneasy they run me back to the line again, and turned me loose. Speakin' about Yanks," he went on, "we 've got five of 'em buried in our own Confederate graveyard in the cemetery, suh; and I 'm kind of afraid it won't be long befo' they 's six of 'em. One of yo' old soldiers from up No'th come down here fo' his health last year; but he 's gone down steadily, and I reckon it ain't for long that he 'll be with us. When we heard he was an old soldier our Post sent him to the hospital, and he 's dyin' there now. He seemed to feel so bad about the idee o' bein' buried in the Potter's Field that we voted to give him a grave with the rest of the boys, and when he goes he 'll lie with soldiers, like he 's allers wanted to do."

I could not find any words in the languages

known to me, dead or alive, to express what I felt, and so I kept silent.

"He won't be forgotten, neither, after he gits there," the old fellow went on. "We have our Memorial Day, just as you have your Decoration Day, and every year we go up to the lot and decorate the graves of 'em all, Yank or Johnny, just the same. We put a little Confederate flag at the head of every grave that holds one of our own; and every one o' them Yanks has a little flag at the head of his grave too, only his is the flag he fought for, just as ours is the flag we fought for. It 's a pretty sight, my friend," he added softly, "with them five little American flags flutterin' away among the sixty or seventy others."

Verily this Southern hospitality is no vain thing, no mere empty show, or ingratiating veneer to make a spurious article seem real. Personal interest may sometimes rest at the basis of a seeming courtesy. Selfishness may lie often at the bottom of a superficial graciousness of manner assumed for the moment to conceal that very selfishness; but the hospitality that leads a body of old soldiers to grant at their own cost, and to take care of with their own loving hands, a green resting place, a

last sanctuary, for a former foe, that indeed is an unselfish, genuine kind of hospitality which, like the peace of God, passeth all understanding.

III

GETTING THE LEVEL

ONE of the more serious dangers confronting the platform speaker is the presumption that his audience will not prove sufficiently intelligent to grasp him when he is at what he thinks is his best. I use the word "presumption" advisedly; for it is sheer presumption and nothing else, and I may add that if my experience has taught me anything, it is that it does not pay to be so presuming. If there is trouble anywhere in "getting one's stuff over," as the saying is, the fault will be found in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred to be with the lecturer, and not with his audience.

My most earnest advice to those platform speakers who feel it necessary to "get *down* to the level" of an audience, instead of feeling an inward urge to climb *up* to it, is that they give up the platform altogether, and take up some other occupation where conscious superiority really counts; say that

of head waiter in a New York restaurant, for instance, or possibly that of literary critic on the staff of a periodical, whose chief concern is pink socks, lavender neckties, and the mysteries of lingerie. In these occupations conscious superiority is an essential of success; but on the lecture platform the consciously superior person cannot in the very nature of things last very long: not in this country, anyhow; for, as I have studied the American people face to face for the past ten years in every State of the Union, I have learned that their capacity for pricking a bubble of pretense on sight is surpassed only by their high appreciation of a speaker who immediately gets into the atmosphere of the special occasion confronting him.

For my own part, I have come to believe that each occasion establishes its own "best," and that the chief duty confronting me is to measure up to the "best" demanded by that occasion if I can. For this reason one's lecture should be a moderately flexible affair, which can be so adjusted to each and every occasion that it fits an audience as nicely as a tailor-made garment. A lecture written out beforehand and committed to memory can never quite fulfil these requirements. It becomes

not a lecture, but an essay; not platform work, but literary work; should be read, not heard; and in its delivery becomes not a sympathetic talk, man to man, but a mere recitation.

No one would be so foolish as to deny, however, that audiences do vary materially in their capacity to take in the subtler points of a lecture "fired" at them from the platform. I should not think of using the same phrases in a talk before a gathering in an East Side settlement house in New York that I would use before the ladies of a Browning Club in the vicinity of Boston, or before a body of college professors, or vice versa. But if I were fortunate enough to be asked to address all three, I should endeavor to vary the wording of my discourse according to the several needs of each, and base my notion of my "best" upon the demands of those particular needs. I confess also that if in one single audience all three classes of listeners were represented, I should not hesitate to put my thought into the language required by the capacity of the East Siders to understand, and be fairly assured of pleasing everybody; for it is my observation of the ways of ladies addicted to Browning, and of gentlemen of the academic kind, that they

are after all very human, and enjoy simplicity of discourse quite as much as the other sort.

There is greater sincerity in "playing to the

"The consciously superior person cannot last long on the lecture platform."

gallery" than most of the critics of that habit dream of, and personally I would rather fall short of the expectations of the boxes than fail in the eyes of the gallery, where reticence in the expression of critical opinion is not exactly a conspicuous virtue. To put it more plainly, I should in-

finitely prefer the humiliation of seeing a highborn lady falling asleep in an orchestra chair because of the bromidic quality of my talk, than be reminded of the same by flying vegetable matter consigned to me by some dissatisfied individual sitting up among the " gods."

An amusing, if somewhat radical, contrast in audiences befell my lot several years ago in the brief space of sixteen hours. In that time I successively addressed the Harvard Union at Cambridge on a Tuesday evening, and the ladies of a Woman's Club in a Boston suburb the following morning. The audience at the Union was gathered in the wonderfully beautiful auditorium of Memorial Hall, and contained not less than twelve hundred particularly live wires, undergraduates mostly, almost fresh from the football field, or at least still under the influence of its system of expressing approval.

As I mounted the rostrum bedlam broke loose: not necessarily as a tribute to myself, but because frenzy is the modern collegiate way of making a visitor feel welcome. Thunderous noises never yet classified shook the rafters — noises ranging from the hoarse clamor of an excited populace at the

finish of some great Olympian event, to the somewhat uncertain cackle of a freshman voice changing from soprano to bass. Pandemonium did not reign: it poured. Not since I visited the London Zoo and witnessed there a fight between two caged lions to the excited, clamorous interest of all the other beasts imprisoned there, have I heard such a variegated din as greeted me on that occasion, and I realized sympathetically for the first time perhaps the true significance of Theodore Roosevelt's "dee-lighted" smile when as President of the United States he took his annual stroll across the football field at a Harvard and Yale game, and listened to the "voice of the people." So contagious was it that I had all I could do to keep from joining in myself and only the necessity of saving my voice for my lecture prevented me from being myself heard above the din.

That noise was the keynote of the evening. I think I may say with due modesty that my lecture had one or two touches of humor in it — three or four, in fact — varying in character from the "scarcely perceptible subtle" to the "inevitably obvious," with other sorts sandwiched in between, and none of them was lost; although I was not per-

mitted to finish many of my sentences. The audience seemed to get in ahead of me every time.

The situation reminded me in a way of the grandstand finish of a poor paralyzed old darky named Joe, of whom I was once told by a Pullman car porter on my way through Montana. Joe had been a famous sportsman in his day; but now misfortune had overtaken him, and he lay bedridden, wholly unable to use his legs, and awaiting the end. Several of his friends, taking pity on him, resolved to give him the joy of one last glorious coon hunt.

They put him on a stretcher and carried him out into the country where that luscious creature "abounded and abutted." The dogs were let loose, and finally showed unusual activity at the base of a tall tree; but, to the dismay of all, the game turned out to be no coon, but a particularly hungry, sore-headed, old she-bear.

As the roaring beast clambered down after her tormentors, Joe's litter bearers, terrified, dropped their burden and made off down the road in coward flight, and it was not until an hour after they had reached home in safety that they thought of the possible fate of their paralytic friend. Conscience-

stricken, they resolved to go to Joe's home and break the news of their cowardly behavior to the presumable widow. The good woman met them at the door.

"What yo' niggahs want round here dis time o' night?" she demanded.

"We come to tell yo' 'bout Joe, Mis' Johnsing," said the embarrassed spokesman.

"Yo' kain't tell me nothin' 'bout Joe what Ah don' know a'ready," replied Mrs. Johnson coldly.

"Yas 'm; but yo' don' know whar Joe is, Mis' Johnsing," persisted the speaker. "We done —"

"Yas, Ah do know whar Joe is," retorted the lady. "He 's upstairs in he bed."

"In he bed?" echoed the astonished visitors.

"Yass," said Mrs. Johnson. "Joe come in ovah an hour ago hollerin' like a bullgine fohty yahds ahead o' de dawgs."

I think I may say without exaggeration that that Harvard Union audience even beat Joe's record; for they were twice "fohty yahds ahead o' de dawgs" all the way through, and as for "hollerin'" they were not so much like one single "bullgine" as like a whole roundhouse full of them,

aided and abetted by a couple of boiler factories in full blast.

And then, only sixteen hours later, came the address at the Woman's Club ten miles out of Boston; the same lecture, in a quiet drawing room, before forty ladies who embroidered and crocheted while I talked, and here the point that had raised the roof and shaken the foundations of the Harvard Union was greeted by the *tapping of a thimble against the wooden frame of an embroidery hoop!*

I cannot say which of the two varieties of approval pleased me more; but I will say that no idea of talking "up" or "down" to my audience occurred to me on either occasion: it was rather a matter of "getting across."

One never can tell save by the "feel" of things in the hour of action how they are going to turn out. Only this last season I found myself, through a misapprehension of the character of my engagement, standing before an audience in a New England amusement park on a Sunday afternoon. I will say frankly that if I had known that I was to be a sideshow to a Ferris Wheel and a scenic railway, with pink lemonade on tap everywhere, and

" all for ten cents," I should not have accepted the engagement. While I have admired them at a respectful distance, I have never envied the wild man of Borneo or the bearded lady their opportunities for personal enrichment; but on this occasion in some way or other I had gained an impression that my date had been arranged by, and was to be under the auspices of, a combination of church interests, designed to offset the evils of Sunday afternoon idleness in a manufacturing town. It was a misunderstanding, however, that I now rejoice in; for, amusement park or not, sideshow or main ring, I found it an enjoyable and educating experience.

I approached it in fear and trembling, especially when I noticed as I was awaiting my " turn " the vast quantities of chewing gum that were being sold to my audience by the inevitable boy with the basket. There is always something disconcerting to a public speaker in the constant, simultaneous, and automatic movement of other jaws than his own, and in the face of a collective jaw, made up of sixteen hundred lowers that chewed as one, I feared that mine, singly and alone, would find the odds against it overpowering. Strange to say,

however, my real fear on this occasion was not on the score of my audience, but whether I should be able to acquit myself creditably before them. I have fondly hoped that my little talk contained a message, and as I observed these seekers after pleasure slowly gathering, and taking their places on tiers of pine benches under the kindly shade of a row of noble pines, it occurred to me that if there was any fruitful soil for my message anywhere it was in the hearts of just such people as sat before me — toilers, the humbler folk, the men and women whose lives had been too busy with bread-and-butter problems for the acquirement of culture, and whose sole opportunity for amusement, uplifting or otherwise, came on these very Sunday afternoons.

There were men and boys there who under other conditions might have been idling on street corners. I counted three Chinese, several Japanese, and a half-dozen Negroes in my audience. A dozen women had their babies with them, and many a small kiddie, too young to chew gum without exposure to the peril of swallowing it, nibbled and absorbed ginger cookies as I watched them. The question became *not* were they good enough for

me, but could I convince them that I was good enough for them. It was not a question of "getting down to their level," but of my own ability to climb up to the level of my opportunity. For the time being whatever superiority there was was altogether on their side, and the point was how I could prove myself the real thing, and not the artificial; how I could find the common denominator which would enable us to get on "like a house afire" together.

As I was speaking the solution came — and a mighty simple one it turned out to be; for it lay wholly in the simplest possible use of the English language. "Cut out the big words," I said to myself. "Cut out all unfamiliar terms. Get right down to good old Anglo-Saxon. Drop such jawbreakers as *differentiate*, *terminology*, *intimations*, *implications*, and *psychological*." My chief hope became that I might once more at least measure up to that condition which was clearly set forth a great many years ago by a Western chairman, at a time when I was too much of a novice to do my work even passably well, who said to me as we walked to my hotel after the lecture was over:

"We don't care so much for your lecture, Mr. Bangs; but we like you, and we 're going to have you back."

Whether or not my plan was successful I shall not attempt to say; but I may be pardoned, perhaps, for recording here one of the most delightful compliments I have ever had, paid me by a threadbare workingman who came up behind me as I was leaving the park that afternoon, and put his arm through mine as he spoke.

"Are you goin' to speak here to-night, Brother?" he said.

"No," said I. "I am hurrying off to Boston on the five o'clock train."

"Well, I 'm sorry," said he. "I wanted to come out and hear ye again."

Bearing upon the cultivation, or lack of it, of the average American audience, I recall a remark made to me several years ago by a well-known poet from the shores of Britain, who had come here to lecture on the Celtic Renaissance.

"I have had a most delightful surprise," said he, "in the wonderful amount of real culture that I have found in the United States, and especially in the smaller communities. Why, do you know,"

he added, "when I first started in on my work I supposed that I should have to spend at least half of my time explaining to my audiences just what a Renaissance was, and the rest in consideration of the Irish movement; but I had n't been here a week before I discovered that for the most part the people I was to talk to knew quite as much as I did about the history of the movement, and I had all I could do to shed any new light on it whatsoever."

He had, fortunately for himself, made the discovery at a critical part of the "lecture game," as some people delight to call it, that it was up to him to keep climbing, and not waste any of his valuable time trying to descend to a lower level, if he wished his discourse to be favorably regarded in this country — a discovery that I devoutly wish some of our modern editors and theatrical managers, who think they must cater exclusively to a "lowbrow" audience, as they call it, a clientele made up out of the whole cloth of their own imaginings, might make.

Our wonderful West frequently affords illuminating incidents demonstrating the real truth, as discovered by our distinguished visitor. I remem-

ber going a few years ago into a small community in Iowa, where possibly the English lecturer would have looked for very little in the way of what he would consider learning. When sitting in the office of the chairman of the lecture committee, a particularly alert young man, a lawyer, and a graduate of the Harvard Law School, the door opened, and a splendid specimen of physical manhood, a typical pioneer in appearance, stalked in. The chairman introduced me to him.

"Mr. Bangs," said he, "I want you to know my father."

The caller gave my hand a grip that even now makes my fingers ache every time I think of it. He then led me to a comfortable, leather-covered arm chair, and, after almost shoving me into its capacious depths, seated himself directly in front of me.

"Sit down, young man," said he. "I want to talk to you."

"Fire ahead!" said I. "And thank you for calling me a young man. I 've been feeling a trifle old for a couple of days."

"Well, you are young compared to me," he said. "I 'm eighty."

"Good Lord!" said I. "You don't look over sixty, anyhow."

"No," he smiled, "I don't — but that 's Ioway. I 've been farmin' out here for nigh onto seventy years, and we 're all too busy to grow old. We live forever in Ioway. It 's the grandest country on the footstool."

I did n't feel at all inclined to dispute him, considering his more than six feet of towering height, the fresh, healthful hardness of his weatherbeaten face, the breadth of his shoulders, and depth of his chest. I contented myself with agreeing with him. And I did n't have to work hard to do that, either; for I have known magnificent Iowa as a most salubrious State for many years.

"Well, you see, sir," I said, "we can't all pick out our birthplaces. I was born in New York through no choice of my own. Some are born at birthplaces, some achieve birthplaces, and others have birthplaces thrust upon them — which last was my case."

"Same here," said he. "I was born in Ohier; but my folks moved out here when I was a babby. I 've lived here ever since — and I 'm glad of it. Of course I hain't had your advantages in gettin'

an eddication — most o' mine 's in my wife's name — but I 've got some, and I 've had to work so dam hard to get it that sometimes I think I appreciate it just a leetle more than you Eastern boys do who have it served to you on a silver platter. I did n't know how to read till I was twenty-five."

"I congratulate you," said I. "Considering the sort of things the greater part of our young people are reading to-day, I wish that condition might prevail a little more widely than it does."

"That 's it," said he. "When a thing comes too easy we 're not likely to make the best of it. When I think of how I had to sweat to learn to read you don't ketch me wastin' any o' my talents in that direction on trash."

"Then," I put in, "the chances are you 've never read any of my books."

"Not many of 'em," he answered; "but one or two folks I know has read 'em, and they tell me there 's nothin' deelyterious about 'em. But I tell ye it was some work for me to get the knack o' readin'; but when it come it come! Ye see, when I first come out here they was n't any schools, and they was n't any too much help around in those days, either. What with farmin', and diggin' food

out o' the ground, and fightin' Injuns, they was n't much spare time for children to spend in schools, even if we 'd a had 'em. But along about the time I was twenty-three years old we started one. We built a little schoolhouse, and then we sent East for a schoolmarm, and when she come she boarded up at our house, and I celebrated by fallin' head over heels in love with her."

"Good work!" said I.

"You bet it was good work!" he blurted out, with an admiring glance at his son. "It was the best work I ever done, and the best part of it was she liked me, and the first thing we knew we got married. Well, sir, do you know what happened then? You 're a smart man, and you won't need many guesses. It was the very thing we might ha' foreseen. The idee o' me, the husband o' the schoolmarm, not knowin' how to read — why, it — was — simply — pree—posterous!"

I don't believe Colonel Roosevelt ever put more syrupy electricity into the first syllable of his famous "deelighted" than that old gentleman got into the *pre* of his "preeposterous."

"Yes, sir," he ran on, "and there was no way out of it but that she should teach me to read.

And she did! It was a tough proposition for that wonderful teacher of mine; but her patience finally pulled us through, and at the end of about a year I was ready to tackle 'most any kind of stunt in the way of a printed page. And then the burning question arose. Now that I know how, what in Dothan shall I read? That 's a big problem, my friend, to a young feller that has earned his right to literature by the sweat of his brow. I was n't goin' to waste any of my new gift on flashy stuff. What I wanted was the real thing, and one mornin' the problem was solved. A copy of a weekly paper come to the house, with an advertisement in it of a book called 'The Origin of the Species,' by a feller named Darwin, costin' two dollars and a half. That was some money in those days; but somehow or other that title sounded good and hefty, and I sent my little two-fifty by mail to the publisher, and within a week or two 'The Origin of the Species' was duly received, and I went at it."

"And what did you make out of it?" I asked, my interest truly aroused.

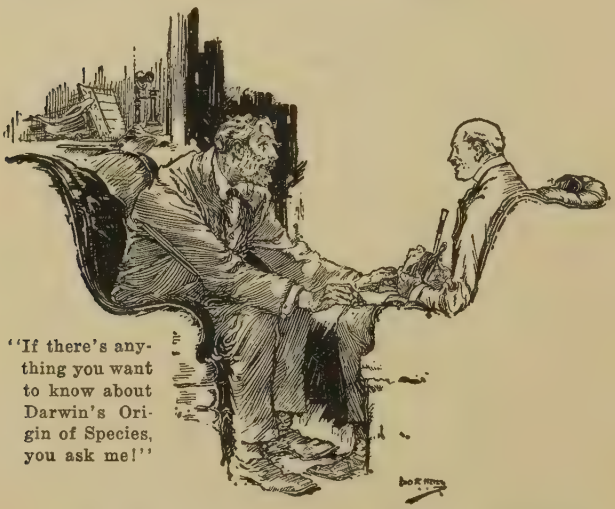
"Nothin'— not the first dam thing at first," said the old gentleman; "except it made me wonder if I had n't lost my mind, or something. I sat

down to read the thing, and by thunder, sir, I could n't make head nor tail out of it! I 'd always thought I knew something about the English language; but this time I was stumped, and it made me mad.

" ' There 's something happened to me,' I said to my wife. ' I 've read this darned first page here over five times, and I 'm blest if I can get a glimmer of anythin' out of it.' She smiled and advised me to try something easier; but, ' *Not — on — your — life!* ' says I. ' I 've been through fire and famine and wind and blizzard in my day. I 've seen the roof over my head burnt to a cinder by savages, and I 've fit Injuns, and come nigh bein' scalped by 'em, and in all my life, my dear,' says I, ' I hain't never been stumped yit, and I don't preepose to begin now, specially by a page o' printed words, said to be writ in the English language — *not — on — your — life!* '

" So I went at it again. I read it, and I reread it. I wrastled with every page, paragraph, and sentence in that book. Sometimes I had to put as much as five days on one page — but by Gorry, son, *when* I got it I got it good, and when it come it come with a rush — and *now* —"

The old man paused, drew himself up very straight, and squaring his shoulders he leaned forward and put his hands on my knees.



"If there's anything you want to know about Darwin's Origin of Species, you ask me!"

" And *now*, my friend," he said, his eye flashing with the joy of victory, " *if there 's anything you want to know about Darwin's Origin of the Species — you — just — ask — me!* "

IV

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

IF there is any man in this wide world who doubts the beauty and heart significance of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, he need only go out upon the lecture platform to have his eyes opened. I know of no workers in the whole field of human effort this side of tramphood itself who need more often the intervention of the Good Samaritan to get them out of trouble than the followers of that same profession.

Indeed, I shall not even except the profession of the Hobo; for there is a certain license granted to this latter sort of Knight of the Road that is denied to us of the Lyceum Circuit. We are prone to forgive a hungry tramp for breaking into a casual hencoop in search of the wherewithal to satisfy the cravings of an empty stomach, and when his weary bones demand a bed there are numerous expedients to which he may resort without loss of

dignity. I doubt, however, that if Dr. Hillis, or the Hon. Champ Clark, or my humble self, were ever caught red-handed with a farmer's fowls dangling by their legs from our fists, or were to be discovered stealing a nap in the soft seclusion of a convenient hayloft, we should get off quite so easily as do poor old Dusty Rhodes and his famous colleague Weary Waggles.

Even as do our less loquacious brothers who foot it across country, and earn their living by making after-dinner speeches to sympathetic farmers' wives, so also do we more advanced members of the Fraternity of Wanderers have often to throw ourselves upon the tender mercies of others to get us out of the unexpected scrapes into which the most careful of us sometimes fall. Life is ordinarily no very simple thing, even to the man who lives all his days in one spot, and knows every curve, crook, and corner of his special surroundings. How much more complicated must it become, then, to him who has to change his spots every twenty-four hours, and day after day, night in and night out, readjust himself to new and unfamiliar conditions!

For the most part our troubles, such as they are, have to do with the natural perversity of train

schedules, or unexpected visitations of Nature which will disarrange the most carefully forecast calculations of men. In the machinery of our existence there are probably more human cogs involved, which require our own individual attention, than in any other known mechanism. Even the actor on the road is better looked after than are we; for he has a manager to arrange for his transportation, to look after his luggage, and to attend to all the little things that go to make or mar the comfort of travel while we of the platform go out wholly upon our own, unattended, and compelled at all times to shift for ourselves.

I have been in many a scrape en route myself; but so far none of them has found me without some personally devised expedient for my relief, or the aid of a chance Good Samaritan, whose constant nearness in the hour of need has convinced me that there are many more of his kind in existence than most people are willing to admit. I have almost gone so far at times as to believe in the "intervention of Providence," and would quite do so did I not feel the idea somewhat belittling to the Divine Intelligence that orders our goings out and our comings in.

On one occasion in the Far West I was so close to a scene of actual murder that I might readily have been held as a material witness, and escaped that great inconvenience only by pursuing the exceedingly difficult policy of holding my tongue — always an arduous proposition for a professional talker. I have faced starvation on a delayed train in Oklahoma, starvation setting in in my case after fifteen hours without food, and been suddenly relieved by the wholly chance appearance, at the tail end of the train, dropping seemingly out of the mysterious regions of Nowhere, of an Italian driving a wagonload of bananas across the track, just as the train was starting along on another interminably foodless stretch; an Italian who with remarkably quick wit — in response to the lure of a new, shining silver dollar tossed into his wagon — heaved a bunch of his stock large enough to feed an orphan asylum on to the back platform.

I have even been threatened with complete annihilation, physical and spiritual alike, by a man big enough to carry out his threat, unless I would join him in a cocktail at six o'clock in the morning, and escaped my doom, not as a great many readers may think, by accepting the invitation, but

only through the timely intervention on my behalf of the blessed gift of sleep, which descended suddenly, and without apparent cause, upon my convivial adversary before he had time to carry out his amiable intentions looking toward my removal from the face of the earth.

But there have been other times when nothing short of the sudden appearance of the Good Samaritan himself has saved me from disaster. Two of these instances I recall with feelings of gratitude, and I record them here with sincere pleasure, since it may be that my willing helpers may read what I have written about them, and learn from the record something of the lasting quality of my grateful appreciation of their courtesy.

The first of these incidents occurred in the distant city of Los Angeles on a memorable afternoon when I was to all intents and purposes stranded; not for the lack of ready money, but for the want of transportation necessary to get me from where I was to the haven where I was critically needed at that moment. It was a matter of making a train or losing a whole chain of profitable engagements, arranged in such sequence that if one were lost the others would in all probability go also.

I was due to lecture in the beautiful California city on a Wednesday evening, and was to go thence to Salt Lake City for a Friday night lecture. Unfortunately for me it happened that on Tuesday I was booked at Tucson, Arizona, and with a strange carelessness of consequences somebody had thrown a glass of water on the tracks of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and thereby completely demoralized the roadbed. I do not wish to libel that useful railway system; but at that time the casual impression of the traveler on the Southern Pacific was that its rails had been laid on water, and were ballasted with quicksand. It should be added in justification of the conditions that the irrepressible Salton Sea, a body of water that has no known parentage in the matter of sources, or real destiny in the matter of utility, and acts accordingly, had been on one of its periodic rampages, the proper handling of which had taxed to the uttermost the ingenuity of the engineers on whose shoulders the responsibility for the line rested. It was Nature who was to blame, and not the authorities.

At any rate, however, there were such serious delays on my way from Tucson to Los Angeles that, scheduled to lecture at the latter city at eight

P.M. on Wednesday evening, I did not arrive there until four o'clock on Thursday morning, and even a Western audience will not submit to any such delay as that. Thanks to the quick wit of my principals, who stood to lose a considerable stake by my failure to appear, another lecture was arranged for Thursday afternoon at one o'clock, although my train for Salt Lake was scheduled to leave at two-forty-five. The plan was for me to take a carriage out to the lecture hall, about forty minutes' drive from the center of activity, to go upon the platform promptly at one o'clock, to condense my talk into one hour, to leave the platform at two, and drive hurriedly over to the San Pedro station, and catch my train with five minutes to spare.

The first part of the program was carried out to the letter, and at five minutes after two I was at the entrance of the hall ready for my drive to the station. But there was no carriage or vehicle of any other known sort in sight. Through some misunderstanding either on my part or on that of the local managers, the carriage that brought me out had not waited, and there was no substitute to be had within reach. What to do became a most

embarrassing question. The succeeding dates had been arranged in such a way that if I failed to catch that train to Salt Lake City my whole tour would come down with a crash.

Fortunately there was a rather fine boulevard running in front of the hall, a rare temptation to speeders both in motors and with horseflesh; and as my managers and I were standing on the curb, expressing our opinion as to the intelligence of hackmen in general and ourselves in particular, and hopelessly scanning the horizon in search of relief, there suddenly emerged out of the gloom, coming along at a rapid pace, a horse lover, seated in a light wagon, and driving a big bay trotter of no mean abilities. He was striking nothing poorer than a two-forty gait, and as he loomed bigger and bigger as he drew nearer he looked like a runaway avalanche; but as he came the idea flashed across my mind that here was my only salvation. I therefore sprang out into the middle of the road, directly in his path, and waved my arms violently at him. The driver drew in his reins with a jerk, and man, horse, buggy, and all came to a sliding, grinding stop. I cannot say that his first remark was wholly cordial.

"What the dash is the matter with you?" he roared.

I panted out my explanation — how my carriage had not come, how much depended on my catching my train, and how completely I had relied on him.

"Oh, that 's it, eh?" he said, amiably calming down. "I thought you 'd escaped from a lunatic asylum or something. Jump in. I can't take you all the way to the station, because I 've got an engagement myself at two-fifteen; but I'll land you at the hotel in a jiffy."

I needed no second bidding, and in a moment we were bounding along at breakneck speed in the direction of the city. We covered the distance that had consumed forty minutes before the lecture in twelve minutes, and all seemed well — only it was not well; for, arriving at the hotel, I found myself still fifteen minutes distant from the railway station, and not a taxi or other kind of cab to be had. What was more, the electric roads were blocked by a fire or something farther up the street. I was as badly off as ever — and then entered the Good Samaritan!

As I stood there in front of the hotel making

sundry observations, most of them unprintable, concerning the quality of my luck, a man of fine appearance came out of the hotel and stepped quickly across the sidewalk to a large touring car that stood awaiting him by the curb. He opened the door, and after seating himself in the tonneau leaned forward to give his instructions to his chauffeur, when I was seized with the inspiration that here indeed was truly my White Hope. Again I took my chances. I sprang forward, laid my hand gently on his arm, and blurted out:

"Excuse me, sir, but my name is Bangs — John Kendrick Bangs. I am out here lecturing, and if I don't catch that two-forty-five train for Salt Lake City I shall lose half a dozen engage-

"I cannot say that his first remark was wholly cordial."

ments. If you have ever read any of my books and liked them, sir, you will be willing to do me a service. If you 've read 'em and not liked them, you 'll be glad to get me out of town. Won't you be a Good Samaritan and give me a lift to the station? *You 're my only hope!* "

" Sure thing! " he answered without an instant's hesitation, opening the door. " Get in — and, James," he added, turning to the chauffeur, " the San Pedro station, and never mind the speed limit."

I clambered into the car as quickly as I could, and the car fairly leaped forward.

" It 's mighty good of you," said I breathlessly as we sped along.

" Don't mention it, Mr. Bangs," said my host. " Glad to be of service to you. I read your ' House-Boat-on-the-Styx ' once with a great deal of pleasure; but there 's one thing about you that I like a great sight better than I do your humor."

" What 's that? " I asked.

" *Your nerve, sir,*" he replied, handing out a cigar.

We caught the train with eight minutes to spare, and as it drew out of the station I realized possibly for the first time in my life that in my particular

line of business *nerve* is a vastly better asset than *nerves*, and I have faithfully cultivated the one and resolutely refused to admit the existence of the other ever since, to my very great advantage.

It may not be without interest to record here that in spite of all my trials and tribulations at Los Angeles, the Salt Lake City engagement was lost. Our engine broke down in the wilds of Nevada, and we did not reach Salt Lake until long after midnight the following night. Nevertheless I kept my hand in; for in response to the request of some of my fellow passengers I delivered my lecture that night in the observation car of the stalled train in the Nevada hills, to an audience made up of fifteen fellow travelers, the train crew, and a half-dozen Pullman porters.

I hesitate to think of what might have been my fate had I employed similar tactics to get me out of such troubles in New York or Boston, or some other of our Eastern cities. The chances are that my name would have been spread upon the blotter of some police court as a disorderly person; but in our great West — well, things seem somehow very different out there. There are not so many sky-scrapers in that part of the country, and the hori-

zon of humanity may therefore be a little broader; and perhaps too the strugglers out there are closer to the period of their own trials and tribulations than we are here in the East, and become in consequence more instantly sympathetic when they see the signal of distress flying before them.

The second incident occurred nearer home. It was in Ohio, at the time of the floods that wrought such havoc in Dayton and thereabouts in the spring of 1913. I had lectured the night before at Ironton, and on my way to Cleveland was to all intents and purposes marooned at Columbus. Much doubt existed as to whether traffic out of Columbus was at all possible, so completely demoralized were all the railroads centering there. It is a cardinal principle with lyceum workers, however, to make every possible effort to get through to their engagements at whatever inconvenience or cost. So in spite of the warnings of subordinate officials I took my chances and went out on a morning train which passengers took at their own peril, through scenes of dreadful desolation, and over a disquietingly soggy roadbed, until the train reached an Ohio city which I shall not identify by name here. While I have no hard feelings against

it, or against any of its citizens, I cannot bring myself to speak of it in terms of "endearment," as I should much prefer to do

At this point our train came to a standstill, and the announcement was made that it would be impossible to get through to Cleveland because all the bridges had been washed away. Motoring over for the same reason was out of the question, and the engagement was lost. I immediately repaired to the telegraph office and sent off several despatches — to the Cleveland people, announcing my inability to get through; to my agents, telling them of my plight; and to my family, assuring them of my safety. These telegrams broke my "financial back"; for when I had paid for them I found myself with only forty cents left in my pocket, marooned possibly for days in wettest Ohio, hungry as a bear, and not a friend in sight.

I did not worry much over the situation, however; for on several other occasions when I found myself penniless in the West and in the South I had not found any trouble in getting some one to cash my check. So, after assuring myself that my train would be held there for at least two or three hours before returning to Columbus, I set

off blithe-heartedly to secure the replenishment of my pocket. In the heavy rain I walked up the main thoroughfare of the little city, and to my great relief espied a national bank on one of the four corners of its square. I walked boldly in and addressed the cashier, telling him my story with a few "well chosen words."

"I thought possibly," said I, as he listened without too great a display of interest, "that in view of all these circumstances you would be willing to take a chance on me, and cash my check for twenty-five dollars."

"Why, my dear sir," he replied, "*this is a bank!*"

I restrained a facetious impulse to tell him that I was surprised to hear it, having come in under the impression that it was a butcher shop, where I could possibly buy an umbrella, or a much needed eight-day clock.

"I know," I contented myself with saying, smiling the while. "That 's why I came here for money."

"Well, you 've come to the wrong place," he blurted out. "*We are not running an asylum to give first aid to the injured!*"

"Thank you, sir," I replied. "You are quite right, and perhaps I should not have asked such a favor — but I'll tell you one thing," I added. "To-morrow or next day when the Governor of this State issues his appeal for aid for the stricken, as he surely will, you will find that the financial men in that part of the world where I come from are running just such institutions, and when that golden horde for the relief of your people pours in from mine I hope it will make you properly ashamed of yourself, if you are not so already."

It was as fruitless as reading a Wordsworth sonnet on nature to a rhinoceros; for all he did was to grunt.

"Humph!" said he, and I walked out.

Another bank was soon found, where I secured not accommodation but a more courteous refusal. The president of the bank was one of the most sympathetic souls I have ever met, and would gladly cash anybody's draft for me; but my own check, that was out of the question. He was a trustee of the funds in his charge — poor chap, apparently without a cent of his own on deposit. However, he was courteous, and vocally sympathetic. He realized very keenly the difficulties of

my position, and actually escorted me as far as the door to see me safely to the perils of the pave, expressing the hope that I would soon find some way out of my difficulty. I returned to the train, ate thirty cents' worth of sardines in the dining car, gave the waiter a ten-cent tip, and repaired to the smoking compartment absolutely penniless. A number of others were gathered there, and we naturally fell into discussing the day's adventures.

"Well," said I, "I've just had one of the strangest experiences of my life. I've been in all parts of the United States in the last eight years, and never until to-day have I found a place so poor in sympathy, and easy money, that I could n't get my check cashed if I happened to need the funds. Why, I've known a Mississippi hotelkeeper who was so poor that his wife had to do all the chambermaid's work in the house, to go out at midnight to *borrow* twenty-five dollars from a neighbor to help me out; but here, with this flood knocking everything galley west, I can't raise a cent!"

And I went on and narrated my experience with the two national banks as recorded here.

"Well, by George!" ejaculated one of the men seated opposite to me, slapping his knee vigorously

as I finished. "I 'm an Ohio man, sir, and I blush for the State. I 'll cash your check for you on your looks. How much do you want?"

"Twenty-five dollars," said I.

"All right," he said, pulling a well-filled wallet from his pocket, and counting out five five-dollar bills. "There 's the stuff."

I thanked him, and drawing my check handed it over to him. He took it, and glanced at the signature.

"*What?*" he exploded. "*The Idiot?*"

This was the title of one of my books.

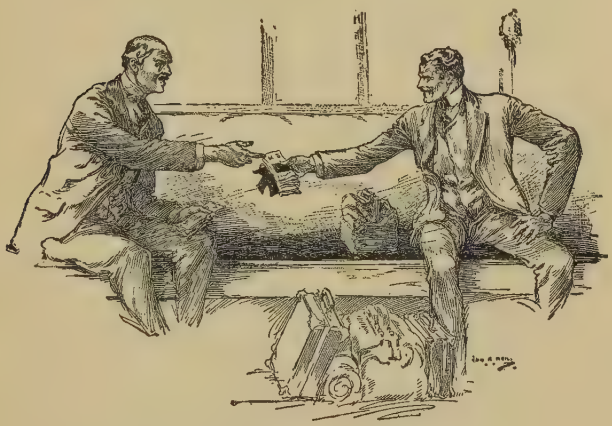
"Guilty!" said I.

"Here, you!" he cried, pulling his wallet again from his pocket, and holding it wide open, displaying a tempting bundle of ten-dollar bills within. "*Here — just help yourself!*"

And yet there are people in this world who ask if "literature" pays!

About the most Samaritan of the Good Samaritans I ever encountered I met in February last in one of the most flourishing of our northwestern cities. He was a Samaritan with what the modern critic would call a "kick" to him — or at least it struck me that way. As I made my way north-

ward from Minneapolis to fill my engagement there I was seized with a terrific toothache which for the time being destroyed pretty nearly all my interest



"I 'm an Ohio man, and I 'll cash the check for you on your looks."

in life. The offending molar was far back in the region of the wisdom section, and inasmuch as it had been somewhat loose in its behavior for several days I decided to be rid of it. All my efforts to extract it myself were unavailing, and finally after a last desperate effort to pull it out myself I returned to my chair in the Pullman car and informed the Only Muse who upon this trip was Seeing America with me that our first duty on reaching

our destination was to find a dentist and get rid of it.

"I hope you will be careful to get the right kind of a man," said she. "We can't afford any quack doctors, you know."

At this moment a charming woman seated on the opposite side of the car leaned over and said,

"I do not wish to intrude, but I have seen how you were suffering, and I just overheard your remark. Now my son-in-law is a dentist, and we think he is a good one. He is coming to meet me at the station, and I think possibly he will be willing to help you."

I thanked the lady, and expressed the hope that he would.

On our arrival at the station the young man appeared as was expected, and my kindly chaperone presented the case.

"He has been suffering dreadfully, James," she said, "and I told him you would pull his tooth out for him."

"But, my dear mother," said the young man, "we are in a good deal of a hurry. We have an engagement for to-night. My office is closed, and we are not dressed for —"

"Thanks just the same," said I. "I am sure you would help me if you could — maybe you will do the next best thing. I can't lecture unless I have this confounded thing out."

"Lecture?" said he. "You are not John Kendrick —"

"Yes — I am," said I.

"Oh," said he, "that 's different. You are our engagement. Come up to my office, and I 'll fix you up in a jiffy."

So we marched five long blocks up to his office, where I was soon stretched out, and the desired operation put through with neatness and despatch.

"Well, doctor," said I as he held the offending molar up before me tightly gripped in his forceps, "you have given me the first moment of relief I have had all day. My debt in gratitude I shall never be able to repay, but the other I think I can handle. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing at all, Mr. Bangs," he replied. "Nothing at all."

"Oh, that 's nonsense, doctor," I retorted. "You are a professional man, and I am a stranger to you — you must charge something."

"Oh, no, Mr. Bangs," said he, smilingly.

"You are no stranger to me. I have been reading your books for the past twenty years, and *it 's a positive pleasure to pull your teeth.*"

V

A VAGRANT POET

THE inimitable and forever to be lamented Gilbert, in one of his delightful songs in Pinafore, bade us once to remember that —

> Things are seldom what they seem—
> Skim-milk masquerades as cream;
> Highlows pass as patent-leathers;
> Jackdaws strut in peacock's feathers.

The good woman who sang this song — little Buttercup, they called her — was in a pessimistic mood at the moment; for had she not been so she would have reversed the sentiment, showing us with equal truth how sometimes cream masquerades as skim milk, and how underneath the wear and tear of time what outwardly appears to be a "high low" still possesses some of the glorious polish of the "patent leather." Everywhere I travel I find something of this latter truth; but never was it more clearly demonstrated than when on one of my Western jaunts I came unexpectedly upon an

almost overwhelming revelation of a finely poetic nature under an apparently rough and unpromising exterior.

It happened on a trip in Arizona back in 1906. My train after passing Yuma was held up for several hours. Ordinarily I should have found this distressing; but, as the event proved, it brought to me one of the most delightfully instructive experiences I have yet had in the pursuit of my platform labors. As the express stood waiting for another much belated train from the East to pass, the door of the ordinary day coach — in which I had chosen to while away the tedium of the morning, largely because it was fastened to the end of the train, whence I could secure a wonderful view of the surrounding country — was opened, and a man apparently in the last stages of poverty entered the car.

He was an oldish man, past sixty, I should say, and a glance at him caused my mind instinctively to revert to certain descriptions I had heard of the sad condition of the downtrodden Westerner, concerning whose unhappy lot our friends the Populists used to tell us so much. He looked so very poor and so irremediably miserable that he excited

my sympathy. Upon his back there lay loosely the time-rusted and threadbare remnant of what had once in the days of its pride and freshness been a frock coat, now buttonless, spotted, and fringing at the edges. His trousers matched. His neck was collarless, a faded blue polka-dotted handkerchief serving as both collar and tie. His hat suggested service in numerous wars, and on his feet, bound there for their greater security with ordinary twine, were the uppers and a perforated part of the soles of a one-time pair of congress gaiters. As for his face — well, it brought vividly to mind the lines of Spenser —

In the last stages of poverty.

His rawbone cheekes, through penurie and pine,
Were shronke into his jawes, as he did never dyne.

The old fellow shambled feebly to the seat ad-

joining my own, gazing pensively out of the window for a few moments, and then turning fixed a pair of penetrating blue eyes upon me. "Pretty tiresome waiting," he ventured, in a voice not altogether certain in its pitch, as if he had not had much chance to use it latterly.

"Very," said I carelessly. "But I suppose we 've got to get used to this sort of thing."

"I suppose so," he agreed; "but just the same for a man in your business I should think it would be something awful. Don't it get on your nerves?"

"What do you know about my business?" I asked, my curiosity aroused.

"Oh," he laughed, "I know who you are. I read one of your books once. I 've forgotten what it was about; but it had your picture in the front of it, and I knew you the minute I saw you. Besides I was down in Tucson the other day, and — you 're going to lecture at Tucson Tuesday night, are n't you?"

"I am if I ever get there," said I. "At this rate of speed I 'm afraid it 'll be season after next."

"Well, they 'll be ready for you when you arrive," he chuckled. "They 've got your picture

plastered all over the place. It 's in every drug-store and saloon window in the town. They 've got it tacked onto every tree, hydrant, hitching post, billboard, and pump, from the railway station out to the university and back. I ain't sure that there ain't a few of 'em nailed onto the ash barrels. You can't look anywhere without seeing John Kendrick Bangs staring out at you from the depths of a photographer's arm chair. Fact is," he added with a whimsical wink, " I left Tucson to get away from the Bangs rash that 's broken out all over the place, and, by Jehosaphat! I get aboard this train, and *there sets the original!* "

I laughed and handed the old fellow a cigar, which he accepted with avidity, biting off at least a quarter of it in his eagerness to get down to business.

" I 'm not so bad as I 'm lithographed," I said facetiously.

" So I see," he replied, " and it must be some comfort to you to realize that if you ever get down and out financially you 've got a first-class case for libel against the feller that lithographed you."

He puffed away in silence for a minute or two,

and then leaning over the arm of his seat he reopened the conversation.

"I say, Mr. Bangs," he said, rather wistfully, I thought, "you must read a great deal from one year's end to another — maybe you could recommend one or two good books for me?"

It was something of a poser. Somehow or other he did not suggest at first glance anything remotely connected with a literary taste, and I temporized with the problem.

"Why, yes," I answered cautiously. "I do run through a good many books in the course of a year; but I don't like to prescribe a course of literary treatment for a man unless I have had time to diagnose his case, and get at his symptoms. You know you might n't like the same sort of thing that I do."

"That may be so too," he observed coolly. "But we 've got some time on our hands — suppose you try me and find out. I 'm willin' to testify. Fire ahead — nothin' like a few experiments."

"Well," said I, "personally I prefer biography to any other kind of reading. I like novels well enough; but after all I 'd rather read the story of

one real man's life, sympathetically presented, than any number of absorbing tales concerning the deeds and emotions of the fictitious creatures of a novelist's fancy. I like Boswell better than Fielding, and Dr. Johnson is vastly more interesting to me than Tom Jones."

"Same here," said my new friend. "That 's what I 've always said. What 's the use of puttin' in all your time on fiction when there 's so much romance to be found in the real thing? The only trouble is that there ain't much in the way of good biography written these days — is there? "

"Oh, yes, there is," said I. "There 's plenty of it, and now and then we come upon something that is tremendously stimulating. I don't suppose it would interest you very much, but I have just finished a two-volume life of a great painter — it is called 'Memorials of Edward Burne-Jones,' written by his wife."

The old man's face fairly shone with interest as I spoke, and reaching down into the inner pocket of his ragged coat he produced a time-smeared, pocket-worn envelop upon which to make a memorandum, and then after rummaging around in the

mysterious recesses of an over-large waistcoat for a moment or two he brought forth the merest stub of a pencil.

"Who publishes that book?" he asked, leaning forward and gazing eagerly into my face.

"Why — the Macmillan Company," I replied, somewhat abashed. "But — would *you* be interested in that?"

And then came the illuminating moment — I fear its radiance even affected the color of my cheeks when I thought of my somewhat patronizing manner of a moment before.

"I guess I would be interested in that!" he replied with a real show of enthusiasm. "*I've always been interested in that whole Preraphaelite movement!*"

I tried manfully to conceal my astonishment; but I am very much afraid that in spite of all my efforts my eyes gave my real feelings away. I swallowed hard, and stared, and the old man chuckled as he went on.

"They were a great bunch, that crowd," he observed reflectively, "and I don't suppose the world realizes yet what we owe to them and their influence. Burne-Jones, William Morris, Madox

Brown, Holman Hunt, and Rossetti — I suppose you know your Rossetti like a book?"

I tried to convey the impression that I was not without due familiarity with and appreciation of my Rossetti; but I began to feel myself getting into deeper water than I had expected.

"There 's a lot of fine things in poetry and in paint we 'd never have had if it had n't been for those fellows," the old man went on. "Of course there 's a lot of minds so calloused over with the things of the past that they can't see the beauty in anything that takes 'em out of a rut, even if it 's really old and only seems to be new. That 's always the way with any new movement, and the fellow that starts in at the head of the procession gets a lot of abuse. Take poor old Rossetti, for instance, how the critics did hand it to him, especially Buchanan — the idea of a man like Robert Buchanan even daring to criticize Rossetti's 'Blessed Damozel'! It 's preposterous! It 's like an elephant trying to handle a cobweb to find out how any living thing could make a home of it. Of course the elephant could n't!"

I quite agreed that the average elephant of my acquaintance would have found the average cobweb

a rather insecure retreat in which to stretch his weary length.

"Do you remember," he went on, "what Buchanan said about those lines? —

> "And still she bowed herself and stooped
> Out of the circling charm
> *Until her bosom must have made*
> *The bar she leaned on warm.*

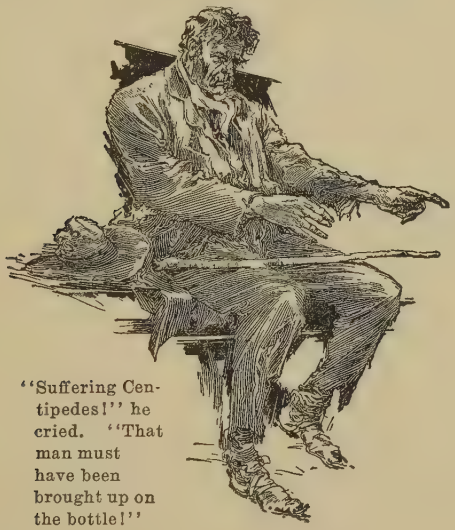
He said those lines were bad, and that the third and fourth were quite without merit, and *almost without meaning!* Fancy that! —

> *"Until her bosom must have made*
> *The bar she leaned on warm*

almost without meaning! Suffering Centipedes!" he cried indignantly. "That man must have been brought up on the bottle!"

I think I may truthfully say that from that point on I listened to the old man breathlessly. Buchanan's monograph on "The Fleshly School of Poetry" though wholly out of sympathy with my own views has long been a favorite bit of literary excoriation with me, comparable to Victor Hugo's incisive flaying of Napoleon III, and to have it spring up at me thus out of the alkali desert, through the medium of this beloved vagabond, was

indeed an experience. Instead of conversing with my friend, I turned myself into what theatrical people call a "feeder" for the time being, putting questions, and now and then venturing a remark



"Suffering Centipedes!" he cried. "That man must have been brought up on the bottle!"

sufficiently suggestive to keep him going. His voice as he ran on gathered in strength, and waxed tuneful and mellow, until, if I had closed my eyes, I could almost have brought myself to believe that it was our much-loved Mark Twain who was speaking with that musical drawl of his, shot through

and through with that lyrical note which gave his voice such rare sweetness.

From Rossetti my new-found friend jumped to Whistler — to whom he referred as "Jimmy"— thence to Watts, and from Watts to Ruskin; from Ruskin he ran on to Burne-Jones, and then harked back to Rossetti again.

Rossetti now seemed to become an obsession with him; only it was Rossetti the poet instead of Rossetti the painter to whom he referred. In a few moments the stillness of that sordid coach was echoing to the sonnet of "Lost Days":

> "The lost days of my life until to-day,
> What were they, could I see them on the street
> Lie as they fell? Would they be ears of wheat
> Sown once for food but trodden into clay?
> Or golden coins squander'd and still to pay?
> Or drops of blood dabbling the guilty feet?
> Or such spill'd water as in dreams must cheat
> The undying throats of Hell, athirst alway?
> I do not see them here; but after death
> God knows I know the faces I shall see —
> Each one a murder'd self, with low last breath;
> 'I am thyself — what hast thou done to me?'
> 'And I — and I — thyself' (lo! each one saith) —
> 'And thou thyself to all eternity.'"

His voice trembled as he finished, and a long silence followed.

"Pretty good stuff, that, eh?" he said, at length.

"Fine!" said I, suddenly afflicted with a poverty of language quite comparable to his own in the way of worldly goods.

"Takes you here, however," said he, tapping his forehead. "Makes you think — and somehow or other I — I don't like to think. I 'd rather feel — and when it comes to that it 's Christina Rossetti that takes you here." He tapped his left breast over his heart. "She 's got all the rest of 'em skinned a mile, as far as I 'm concerned. I love that 'Up Hill' thing of hers — remember it? —

"Does the road wind up-hill all the way?
Yes, to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
From morn to night, my friend.

"But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for where the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that Inn.

"Shall I meet other wayfarers at night?
Those who have gone before.
Then must I knock, or call when just in sight?
They will not keep you standing at the door.

"Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak?
Of labor you shall find the sum.
Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
Yea, beds for all who come.

"Ah, me!" he said. "I've got a deal of heartening out of that, and then some day when things don't seem to go just right, I sing for my comfort that song of hers:

"When I am dead, my dearest,
Sing no sad songs for me;
Plant thou no roses at my head,
Nor shady cypress tree:
Be the green grass above me,
With showers and dew-drops wet,
And if thou wilt, remember,
And if thou wilt, forget.

"I shall not see the shadows.
I shall not feel the rain.
I shall not hear the nightingale
Sing on, as if in pain:
And dreaming through the twilight
That doth not rise nor set,
Haply I may remember,
And haply may forget."

The train had long since started on toward our destination, the old fellow discoursing gloriously as we ran along, I utterly unconscious of everything save the marvelous contrasts of that picture — a seemingly wretched vagabond, held in the

grip of a relentless poverty, pouring forth out of the depths of a rich mind as rare a spiritual disquisition as I ever remember to have enjoyed. Our destination finally reached, I held out my hand to bid him good-by.

"I can't thank you sufficiently," I said, "for a wonderful hour. I want you to do something for me. You see you have the advantage of me. You know who I am; but I don't know who you are. Won't you tell me your name, that I may add it to the list of my friends?"

The old fellow's eyes filled with tears. He laid his hand gently on my shoulder. "My young friend," he said, his voice growing hoarse and husky again, "*who* I am is one of the least important things on the face of God's beautiful green earth. What is really important is the *kind* of man I am. *I am one of those unfortunates who started in life at the top of the ladder and moved in the only direction he thought was left open to him.*"

He seized my hand, gave it a soft, seemingly affectionate pressure, and walked away, leaving me standing alone, and I have not seen nor heard from him since.

VI

BACK-HANDED COMPLIMENTS

IN a previous chapter of these rambling reminiscences I have said that I defied any really human man to return from a lecture season in this country in a pessimistic frame of mind. To this defiance I would add another. I defy any man possessed of a hide anywhere short of that of a rhinoceros, or a head of a thickness less than solid ivory, to return from a tour of our country with any greater sense of his own importance than he is entitled to.

There are a good many plain truths spoken in the presence of the lecturer by the good people to whom he is consigned, especially in our delightfully frank West, where they seem to have acquired the knack of drawing a clean-cut distinction between the lecturer as a man and the lecturer as a lecturer. Discourtesy is never encountered anywhere. At least in the ten years of my platform experience, with nearly a thousand public

appearances to my credit, I have met with it only twice, and on both occasions in Eastern communities; a proportion so negligible as to amount really to nothing. Hospitality to the man has always been cordial; the attitude toward the lecturer respectful. But in the showing of this respect there is no slopping over, though now and then there is an atmosphere of reserve in its manifestation which serves the lecturer better in the line of criticism, if he is capable of sensing its significance, than any amount of outspoken condemnation.

There is one element in the work of the Man on the Platform that is in itself of the highest disciplinary value, and that is that in all circumstances *he must deliver his goods himself.* There is nothing vicarious about the operation. No substitute can relieve him of that necessity. The man who writes books, or makes shoes or motor-cars, can sit apart and let others face whatsoever blame may be visited upon a middle man for defects of workmanship; but for the lecturer there is no such happy shifting of responsibility. If people find his discourse dull, they either get up and walk out, or, as the saying is, they "go to sleep in his face."

Occasionally, however, an ostentatiously emphatic expression of disapproval gives the man on the platform a chance to redeem himself. It is told of Henry Ward Beecher that on one occasion something he had said proved so offensive to one

"The lecturer must deliver the goods!"

of his auditors, who happened to be sitting in the front row of a large and reverberant auditorium, that the individual rose bruskly and walked out. As a sort of underscoring of his disapproval the protesting soul was aided by a pair of new shoes that squeaked so audibly as he strode down the aisle that they distracted the attention of every-

body. Mr. Beecher immediately stopped short, and waited until the dissatisfied person had faded through the doorway and the last echo of his suffering boots had died away, and then, with a benignant smile, recited that good old nursery rime so dear to the hearts of our childhood:

> Rings on his fingers,
> And bells on his toes;
> He shall have music
> Wherever he goes.

It was a bit of ready repartee that captivated the audience, and if there were present any others who later found themselves in a protesting mood it is pretty certain that they waited for a safer occasion upon which to manifest it. Mr. Beecher on his feet was never a man to be trifled with.

On a stumping campaign myself a number of years ago I was confronted by a somewhat similar condition. An allusion to a statesman whom I greatly admired elicited a decided hiss from a group of hostiles seated under the gallery of a rural opera house. I silenced the hiss by pausing in my remarks and appealing to the janitor to "turn off that steam radiator," since the hall was evidently already too hot for the comfort of some

of the audience. It was not particularly deft, but it served the purpose, and we heard no more from that particular quarter for the rest of the evening.

It is a safer rule, however, for the speaker to try to conciliate the hostile element, and it has been a rule of mine for the last five years to endeavor to locate such centers of frigidity as may be found before me, and then direct all my energies toward " thawing them out." Popular as the platform is in all parts of the country to-day, there is always present in every community a small leaven of at least reluctant men who are dragged unwillingly to the lecture halls by their enthusiastic wives, when, if they were only permitted to have their own way, they would be resting tranquilly at home, slippers on feet, feet on fender, book or favorite newspaper in hand, and a sweet-scented briarwood pipe for company. It is not difficult to locate these sufferers. They are such conscious martyrs that they immediately betray themselves, and as a rule while my chairmen are introducing me to my audiences I scan the rows of faces before me in search of them.

They have certain unmistakable earmarks that

betray them to the sympathetic eye — which, with all due modesty, I may claim mine to be; for, while I love lecturing, being lectured to or at, as the case may be, bores me to extinction. I am like those doctors who rejoice in the opportunity to amputate another man's leg, but would not give seven cents to cut off one or both of their own.

The first of these earmarks is the expression of the face, which is either one of hopeless resignation, or full of lowering, one might almost say vengeful, contempt, as if the owner of the face were calling down inwardly all the wrath of Heaven upon the lecturer in particular, and the whole lyceum movement in general. With both these expressions go arms tightly folded across the breast, as though the sufferer were really trying hard to hold himself in.

"They may 'go to sleep in his face.'"

The second almost certain manifestation is in the physical relation of the sufferer to the chair in which he sits. He makes it bear the heavy material burden of his despair by sitting not as Nature intended that he should sit, but as nearly upon the small of his back as the available space at his disposal will permit. If he occupy an aisle seat, he sits wholly on the small of his back, with his legs crossed, and his hands tightly clasped across his freer knee.

Once located, this man is the special person that I go after. It becomes my persistent effort, and in so far as I can master the situation my determination, to win his reluctant heart. If I can only get him sitting up like a vertebrate animal, using his spine like a prop instead of like a hammock, and returning my gaze with a gleam of interest, I am happy. If I can get him not only to sit up but to lean forward with his head cocked to one side, much as a horse will cock its ears when something unexpected comes within the range of its vision, I feel that I have scored a triumph. I should say that at a rough guess in eight cases out of ten the effort is successful, although there have been ninth and tenth cases that have chilled me to

the marrow, and sent me home with an uncomfortable sense of failure.

My lamented friend, the late R. K. Munkittrick, an American humorist who never really received the full measure of appreciation to which his delicious humor entitled him, once when we were "reading" together one night at Albany, scoring a fiasco so complete that we could only laugh over it, put the situation before me in terms so wholly comprehensive that I have never forgotten it.

"See that red-headed chap in the fourth row?" he whispered, as the chairman was indulging in some extended remarks concerning our greatness to which we could never hope to live up.

"You mean the pall bearer with the green necktie?" I asked,

"Yes," said Munkittrick, "he 's the one."

"Well — what of him?" said I.

"Oh, nothing," grinned Munkittrick, "but I 'll bet you seven dollars and forty-seven cents he 's bet the boxoffice fifty cents we can't make him laugh."

I may record with due humility that if good old

Munkittrick's surmise was correct our highly chromatic but otherwise funereal friend won his bet. I doubt we could have moved him with dynamite.

But these gentlemen serve a highly useful purpose. They keep us with our feet on the earth, and prevent us from soaring too high in our own estimation.

Another effective factor in this disciplinary element in platform work is the "back-handed" compliment that leaves the party of the second part suspended like Mahomet's coffin, midway between heaven and earth, and in some uncertainty as to exactly where "he is going to get off." I have rejoiced in several such. The great State of Pennsylvania, which has "officially" done so much for the platform by its liberal appropriations for teachers' institutes, enabling the school centers to secure the services of speakers of high cost who would otherwise be beyond their reach, is responsible for one of these.

It occurred some three years ago, and grew out of an unexpected summons by wire from one of the largest cities of the Quaker State asking me to "fill in" for Dr. Griggs, who because of sudden

indisposition was unable to meet his engagement in a large and important course there. It was an emergency call, which fortunately found me disengaged, and willing to serve.

The chairman of the occasion was a delightful individual, with a considerable fund of dry humor, and his introduction was a gem of subtle wit. It occupied about fifteen minutes, the first five of which were devoted to matters pertaining to the course; the second five to a well deserved eulogy of Dr. Griggs for his inspiring lectures and the uplifting nature of his work, coupled with an expression of the intense disappointment which he, the chairman, knew the audience must feel on learning that the good doctor could not be present. I thought he rather rubbed the "disappointment" idea in a little too vigorously; but I tried not to show it, and sat through that part of the chairman's remarks with the usual stereotyped smile of satisfaction at hearing a colleague so highly spoken of. This done, the chairman launched himself upon a four-minute discourse upon what he called "The Age of Substitution."

"You know, my friends," said he, "that this

great age in which we live is so rich in resources that at times when we cannot immediately lay our hands on some particular article we happen to want there is always to be found somewhere a *just as good as* article to take its place. If you desire a particular kind of porous plaster to soothe an all-too-self-conscious spine, and the druggist you call upon for aid does not chance to have it in stock, he invariably has another at hand which he assures you will do quite as well. So it is with the nerve foods, breakfast foods, corn plasters, face powders, facial soaps, suspenders, corsets, liver pills, and lecturers. If we have n't what you want, we have something just as good in this Age of Substitution. So is it with us to-night. While we may not receive the all-wool-and-a-yard-wide spiritual uplift that Dr. Griggs would have given us, we are privileged to listen to the near-silk humor of a substitute, who, the committee in charge venture to hope, will prove to be *just as good as* the other. We of course don't know that it will be; but we live in hope as well as on it, and, lacking the great satisfaction that I had expected to be mine in presenting Dr. Griggs to you this evening, it still gives me a certain melancholy pleasure

to introduce to this audience that highly mercerized near-speaker, Mr. Just-as-Good-as K. Bangs, on whose behalf I bespeak your charity and your tolerance."

As a rule I like to play a little with my chairmen; but I deemed it unwise on this occasion to "monkey with a buzz saw," and plunged directly into the work in hand without venturing upon the usual facetious preliminaries. I felt that I had enough work cut out for me already, and for an hour and a half exerted myself strenuously to be *just as good as* I could be, neither more nor less. Then, when it was all over, and my case was in the hands of the jury, a charming woman, with a delectable smile on her face, came rushing up to the platform. She seized my hand and shook it vigorously as she spoke.

"Oh, Mr. Bangs," she said with an enthusiasm so delightful that I listened eagerly for the honeyed words to come, "we are so glad you came! *You have made our disappointment complete!*"

Another incident I prefer not to locate other than by saying that it was in the West — and where the West begins no man may say. I know a New York lady to whom it begins at the Cort-

landt street opening of Mr. McAdoo's Hudson River tubes, who has no notion at all that anything lies beyond save the names of a few cities that mean nothing to her, and the Rocky Mountains. With others it begins on the banks of the Mississippi. Once in the heart of Iowa, when I was speaking to a young college student there on the glorious opportunities of the West, in the hope of making him see how much I appreciated the wonderful country in which he lived, the young man staggered me with the reply:

"Yes, sir, I believe you are right. *My father wants me to go West when I get through with my work here.*"

So it would seem that the old rime about the little insect —

> Every flea has a little flea to bite him,
> And so it goes ad infinitem —

may very well be adapted to the uses of those good souls who now and then try to reach the infinity of westernness. But there is another poem more directly applicable to some conclusion as to the problem, which I like to think of in moments when I am reflecting upon its cordial welcome to me:

Out where the hand clasp 's a little stronger,
Out where a smile dwells a little longer —
That's where the West begins.
Out where the sun is a little brighter,
Where the snows that fall are a trifle whiter,
Where the bonds of home are a wee bit tighter —
That 's where the West begins.

Out where the world is in the making,
Where fewer hearts with despair are aching —
That 's where the West begins.
Where there 's more of singing and less of sighing;
Where there 's more of giving and less of buying,
And a man makes friends without half trying —
That 's where the West begins.

The author of those lines, who was, I believe, Arthur Chapman of Denver, seems to me to have come closer to a solution of the problem than any other. For our own purposes just now, however, let us say that the incident to which I wish to refer took place in that part of the West which lies between Sandy Hook and the Golden Gate.

My audience in this particular spot was delightfully responsive; so much so that I was all of two hours in the delivery of a lecture that ordinarily takes me an hour and a quarter to deliver. It was as exhilarating as a cross-country run, with turf and skies just right. But for the pauses made necessary by the interruptions in ap-

preciation I should have galloped across the finish line in less than an hour. So stimulating in fact was the readiness of the good people before me to take what I had to say and run away with it, that, while I was immortally tired when I went out upon the platform, when I finished I could have started in and done it all over again with zest.

But even with so pleasing a background of responsiveness, there was one young man seated in the front row who was a source of particular pleasure to me. He was a rather distinguished looking youth, with flashing eyes, and somewhat longish blond hair, and a physique that suggested a modern Viking. There was something in his face that suggested the scholarly habit — occasionally his expression was wistfully questioning. His eyes never left my face while I was speaking, and his physical attitude, forward-leaning, and a trifle tense, seemed to betoken an interest in what I had to say that was more than gratifying, and his mouth was kept half open, ever ready for action. If there was to be anything to laugh at, he at least was not going to be caught napping, or in any way unprepared, if by keeping his mouth

open he could remove all obstacles that would have prevented the easy flow of his mirth.

And his laugh! I wish I might have a rubber record of that laugh to secrete in an automatic machine located somewhere in the middle of my lecture halls, so that in response to the pressure of an electric button it could be let loose at certain psychological moments. It was as infectious a laugh as I ever listened to, and there were times when its contagion brought me perilously close to seeming to laugh at my own jokes — which is a dangerous thing for a lecturer to do, and contrary to the technic of the "business," which requires humorous periods to be delivered with a face solemn to the point of the funereal. It had really musical modulations, rising from pianissimo to fortissimo on the wings of nicely graded crescendos, and returning whence it had come with a sort of rippling gurgle that was mighty fetching.

Finally not only was nothing I had in mind lost upon him, but he actually appeared to discover subtleties of wit in my discourse of whose presence I had not myself had the slightest suspicion. It is hardly necessary to say that he was pleasing

unto my soul, and naturally enough I spoke of him afterward to my chairman.

"Well, Mr. Bangs," said the chairman as we walked back to the hotel together after the lecture was over, "what did you think of your audience to-night? Some responsiveness there, all right, eh?"

I was impulsively enthusiastic enough to say that I thought it was a "corking good audience." "If they were all like that," said I, "this work would be as easy as cutting calves-foot jelly with an ax."

"I thought you liked them," said he. "Our people here are appreciative, and they believe the laborer is worthy of his hire in showing it."

"I 'll put Blanksville down in my red-letter book," said I. "But tell me who and what is that rather distinguished looking young man with the longish blond hair and snappy eyes, who sat in the aisle seat of the front row next to the white-haired old lady with an audiphone? He had a wistful sort of face, and —"

"Oh, I know who you mean," said the chairman. "He 's So-and-So. What about him — he did n't bother you, I hope?"

"On the contrary," said I, "I loved him. He was about the most appreciative chap I ever talked to. He fairly hung on every word I spoke, and when it came to a funny point I 'm blest if he did n't meet me more than halfway!"

"Yes," said the chairman, "he would. He 's half-witted."

My swelling head immediately resumed its normal proportions, and when I left Blanksville the following morning the only discomfort I found in wearing my regular hat was that in some way or other it seemed to have grown a little too large for me, and showed a tendency to settle down over my ears. I have nevertheless comforted myself with the thought that sometimes the difference between half-wittedness and genius is so slight to the eye of the familiar beholder that wise men are not infrequently believed by their neighbors to be fools. My young friend after all may have been a poet, and, like some prophets, "without honor in his own country."

VII

FRIENDS OF THE ROAD

IN the days of my cynicism I used to laugh in my sleeve, and occasionally in print, at the ways of the politicians and statesmen en route, who have their pictures taken hobnobbing with locomotive engineers, trainmen, and Pullman porters. Since I have myself become a professional wanderer and have come into closer, somewhat enforced, fellowship with these individuals I laugh at the politicians and statesmen no more. On the contrary I commend them, and I think with appreciation and gratitude of a poem by George Sterling, one of our real voices to-day calling down blessings on the heads of these "workers of the night" to whose watchful care we who travel intrust our lives.

One who makes only occasional journeys by rail is not likely to think very much about the man at the throttle; but when one has practically

lived on the rail for two or three months running, not only the man at the throttle, but the man at the switch, the flagman, the fireman, the conductor, and the Pullman porter as well, come to be in a very real sense members of his family.

Mr. Carnegie's hero medals are often bestowed, and worthily, upon men who on sudden impulse have performed some deed of heroism and self-sacrifice for the benefit of others; but I have yet to hear of one of these desirable possessions being bestowed upon the flagman who, in the face of a raging blizzard, at midnight, the thermometer at zero, leaves the comparative comfort of the rear car, and walks, whistling for company, back some four or five hundred yards along the icy track, and stands there with his red lantern in hand to warn a possibly advancing train behind of danger ahead.

When the ice-incased wires are down, and the signal and switch towers are out of commission because of the rampageous elements, how many of us who lie comfortably asleep in the warm berths of our stalled trains give so much as a thought to the man outside in the freezing cold of the night,

keeping the switches clear that we may proceed, or to the flagman at the rear, shelterless before the storm, who stands between us and disaster? Most of us, I fancy, do not think of them at all, and I fear that many of us so occupy ourselves with self-sympathy on these occasions that we find no words of commendation in our hearts for anybody connected with the whole railway system; but rather words of condemnation for that system and everybody connected with it, from the innocent stockholder looking for dividends, all the way down to those poor devils who have forgotten under the stress of demoralizing conditions to fill the water tanks that we may drink and get our fair share of the nation's supply of typhoid germs.

For myself, I can truthfully say that the remark of a railway official made to me many years ago in response to one of my complaints has of late years gathered considerable force and significance. This gentleman was a neighbor of mine, and one Christmas he presented me with an annual pass on the Hudson River Railraod. It was a delightful gift, and I used it with enthusiasm. One morning, however, as he and I sat together on

a local train that had in some mysterious way managed to lose four hours on a thirty-minute run, I turned to him and said:

"Charlie, sometimes I wish I had never accepted that confounded old pass of yours. I've bartered my freedom of speech for a beggarly account of empty minutes. If it was n't for that blankety-blank pass, I could tell you what I think of your blinkety-blink old road. Here we are four hours late on a thirty-minute run!"

"Why, my dear boy," he replied with an amiable smile, "you are dingety-dinged lucky to get in at all!"

Individually I have experienced so much kindliness and courtesy at the hands of the personnel of our railroads in all parts of the United States that I sometimes get real satisfaction out of sharing with them the discomforts of travel. I have discovered without half trying that there are profound depths of friendliness in them which need to be given only half a chance to manifest themselves. Rarely indeed have I met with discourtesy at their hands, and many a weary hour has been cheered by their native wit. For the most part, naturally, my contact has been with the

station agent and the conductor — and the Pullman porter.

While I deplore the abuses of tipping in this and other countries, I have rarely grudged the Pullman porter his well earned extra quarter. Perhaps the general run of us have not had the time, nor the inclination, to acquaint ourselves with the difficulties of the Pullman porter's job. We don't realize that with a car full of people ten passengers will want the car cooled off, ten others will want a little more heat, five will complain that there is too much air, five others will complain that there is too little; and poor Rastus, ground between the two millstones of complaint, has to make a show of pleasing everybody. He above all others would be justified in announcing as his favorite poem those fine old lines:

> As a rule a man's a fool:
> When it's hot he wants it cool;
> When it's cool he wants it hot —
> Always wanting what is not.

I recall one fine old darky once on a train running into Cleveland, who was very unhappy over a complaint of mine that, with a car crowded to

the limit with women and children, some cigarette fiend had vitiated what little air there was in the car by smoking in his berth. I was awakened at three o'clock in the morning by the oppressive odor of burning paper and near-perique. There is no mistaking the origin of that aromatic nuisance, and my gorge rose at the boorish lack of consideration that the smoker showed for the comfort and convenience of his fellow travelers. I pressed the button alongside my berth, and a moment later the porter was peering in at me through the curtains.

"Look here, John," said I in a stage whisper, "this is a little too much! Somebody in this car is smoking cigarettes, and I think it 's a condemned outrage. With all these ladies on board it seems to me that you ought to insist that the man who can't restrain his passion for cigarettes should get off at the next stop and take the first cattle car he finds running to where he thinks he is going."

"Yas, suh," returned the porter sadly. "It 's too bad, suh, an' I 've tried my bes' to stop 'em twice, suh."

"Well, by George!" said I, sitting up. "If

they won't stop for you, maybe they will for me. If any man aboard this car thinks he can get away with a nuisance like this —"

"Yas, suh," said the porter; "but that 's jest whar de trouble comes in, suh. I been after 'em, suh; but it ain't no use. In bofe cases, suh, it was de ladies deirsefs dat was a-doin' all de smokin', suh."

"I have been after 'em, suh; but it ain't no use."

And he grinned so broadly as I threw myself back on my pillow that when I finally got to sleep again I dreamed of the opening to the Mammoth Cave, through a natural association of ideas.

Occasionally one finds some trouble in keeping ahead of the Pullman porter in the matter of repartee. There used to be on the night run to Boston a venerable chap, black as the ace of spades, but patriarchal in his dignity, of whom I was very fond. He was as wide awake at all

hours of the day and night as though sleep had not been invented. Like most of his class, he was inclined to bestow titles on his charges.

"Yo' got enough pillows, Cap'n?" he asked on one occasion, after he had fixed my berth.

"Yes, Major," I replied, putting him up a peg higher. "But it 's a cold night, and I think another blanket might come in handy."

"All right, Cunnel," said he, adding to my honors. "I 'll git hit right away."

"Thank you, General," said I, as he returned with the desired article.

"Glad to serve yo', Admiral," said he with deep gravity.

"And now, Bishop," said I, resolved to keep at it until I scored a victory, "suppose —"

"Hol' on, mistuh!" he retorted instantly. "Hol' on! Dey ain't mo'n one puhson in de Universe whut 's higher 'n a bishop, an' I knows mighty well yo' ain't Him!"

Our dusky brothers not infrequently fill me with a sense of consolation in difficult moments. Two such cases occur to me at this writing; one in my own experience, and the other in a story I heard in the South last winter, the mere thought of which

has many times since served to soften my woes in troublesome moments.

The first occurred several years ago, when the steel passenger cars first came into commission. Being myself of a somewhat inflammable nature, I make it a rule to travel on these in preference to the old-fashioned tinder boxes of ten years ago whenever I can. On this particular occasion, however, on a hurried midwinter night run, I found myself in a highly ornate, lumbering Pullman of the vintage of '68. It was an essentially mid-Victorian affair, and in the matter of decoration was a flamboyant specimen of the early A. T. Stewart period of American interior embellishment.

Those whose memories hark back that far will remember that the Pullman Company's money at that time was largely expended on lavish ornamentation of a peculiarly assertive rococo style, consisting for the main part of an eruption of gew-gaws which ran riot over the exposed surfaces of the car like a rash on the back of a baby. The external slant of the upper berth in these cars was ever a favorite surface for this particular kind of gew-gawsity, and no occupant of a lower berth

known to me ever succeeded in getting safely into bed, or out of it, without having one or more of these lovely patterns imprinted on the top of his head with more force than delicacy. In collisions the occupant of one of these varnish-soaked orgies of fretwork had about as much chance of escaping unscathed as what a dear clerical friend of mine in a lay sermon once characterized as "a celluloid dog chasing an asbestos cat through the depths of purgatory." Whenever I find myself on one of these cars I think instinctively of just three things, and in this order — my past life, my possible permanent future, and my accident insurance policy — and try to comfort myself by playing both ends against the middle.

In my haste on this occasion I had not particularly noticed the characteristics of the car until I attempted to remove my shoes to retire. As I sat up after untying the laces I was brought to a painful realization of the oldtime nature of the vehicle by having impressed most forcibly upon the top of my head the convolutions of an empire wreath, carved out of pine splints, and embossed with gold leaf, which served to give Napoleonic dignity to the upper berth when not in use. The

jar, plus the ensuing association of ideas, brought to my mind an uneasy realization of the probable truth that the car was of antique pattern, about as solid as any other box of potential toothpicks, and as fireproof as a ball of excelsior soaked with paraffin. At the moment the porter happened to be passing with the carpet-stepped ladder to assist a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound traveling man into the berth overhead, and I addressed him.

"See here, porter!" said I. "What kind of car do you call this, anyhow? Is n't this the car Shem, Ham, and Japhet took when they moved back to town from Ararat?"

"Yas, suh," he answered. "She suttinly am an ol' timah, suh."

"Well, I don't feel exactly safe, George," said I. "Are n't there any steel cars on this train?"

"Oh, we 's all safe enough, suh," said George, with the assurance of one who is so well intrenched that no foe on earth could possibly get at him. "De cyar behind an' de cyar in front, dey 's bofe steel, suh."

I had never expected to enjoy in this life the sensations that I suspect are those of a mosquito when he finds himself caught between the aveng-

ing palms of a horny-fisted son of toil, who has at last got a pestiferous nuisance where he wants him; but I must confess that such were my sensations that night; and every time the train came to a sudden stop in its plunging through the dark I had a not too comfortable sense that when the steel front of the car behind finally came to meet the iron end of the car ahead, through the unresisting mass of splinters and Empire wreaths between, I would personally, in all likelihood, more closely resemble a cubist painting of a sunset on the Barbary Coast than a human being. I imagine that what really carried me uninjured through the nervous ordeal of that night was the amused view I took of good old George's notions as to what constituted absolute safety.

The other incident, as narrated to me by a fellow traveler, has given me much comfort in exasperating moments. In sections of the South and West the engineers have not as yet mastered the art of stopping or starting their trains gently. When they stop they stop grindingly, with jolts and jars sudden and violent enough to send a snoring traveler full of stored up impetus head first through a stone wall; or, if it be in the day-

time, with a jerk of such a nature as would snap his head off completely if the latter were not so firmly fastened to his neck. It is a method that may do very well for freight, but for passengers and dynamite it has its disadvantages.

It was on a line renowned for its jarring methods that the incident of which my friend told me is alleged to have occurred. A train made up of day coaches and Pullman sleepers broke through a wooden trestle and landed in a frightful mass of twisted wreckage on the bottom of a ravine some eighty feet below. The wrecking crew worked nobly, and after several hours of heroic effort came to a crushed and splintered sleeper at the base of the ruin. There amid the debris, sleeping peacefully, with a beam across his chest, lay the porter, wholly unhurt, and dreaming. He was even snoring. The foreman of the wrecking crew, with suitable language expressing his amazement at the miracle, finally succeeded in getting Sambo half awake.

"Wh-whut 's de mattah?" stammered Sambo, sitting up, and gazingly dazedly at the ruin on every side.

"Matter?" echoed the foreman. "Why,

Jumping Jehoshaphat, man! Don't you know that this whole dod-gasted train has fallen through the trestle? It 's a wonder you were n't killed. Did n't you feel anything?"

"Why, yas, boss," said Sambo. "I did feel sumpin' kind o' jolty; but I t'ought dey was jes' a-puttin' on de dinah at Jackson."

So it is that nowadays when these jolting, jarring notes come along to vex my soul I no longer lose my temper as I used to do, but think rather of that old darky and "de dinah at Jackson," and wax mellow, feeling that that story alone, true or not, is a full justification of all the sufferings I or others have had to endure at the ungentle hands of the freight engineer at the passenger throttle.

These men on the engines are great characters, and whenever I can get into touch with them I do so. In some of my zigzagging trips hither and yon in the Middle and Northwest I often find myself back to-day on some train or other that has carried me along on some previous trip, and it is frequently much like a family reunion when I meet the crew for a third or fourth time. "Glad to see you back," is a familiar greeting from conductors, engineers, flagmen, and porters alike. There is

one diner on a Western run that I have visited so frequently that I receive all the kindly special attention one used to look for at an inn to which he was a constant visitor; and I think it all grew out of the fact that the first time I traveled on that particular car I summoned the man in charge to complain of the pie.

"These men on the engines are great characters."

"I don't like to complain," said I; "but this pie —"

"What 's the matter with the pie?" he asked, bristling a little.

"Why," said I, "it 's so confoundedly good that even a whole one could n't satisfy me!"

Ever since the registry of that complaint I have really had more than the law allows on that particular car. Preferential treatment that would fill the Interstate Commerce Commission with anguish is always mine. Neither the rack nor all the fires of the Inquisition could extract from me

its precise identity, lest its kindly crew be fined for overcourtesy to a specific individual.

But to return to the engineers: I have always cherished the memory of a stolid old graybeard in command of a special train circumstances once compelled me to hire in order to meet an Arizona date for which there was no possible regular connection by rail. My special started from Phœnix shortly after midnight of a stormy day, to carry me down to Maricopa, there to connect with an early morning express into Tucson. The train consisted of an engine and a single day coach. Inasmuch as it was mine for the time being, and at considerable cost, I decided to exercise my proprietary rights and ride on the engine. A heavy rain which had been falling all day had changed the dry, sandy beds of the Salt and Gila rivers to torrential streams, to the great disadvantage of the roadbeds. We literally seemed to be feeling our way along in the dark, until suddenly the clouds broke away and a glorious moon shed its radiance over everything. Just at this point the engineer with a startled exclamation seized the throttle and brought us to a disquietingly abrupt stop. He whispered a word or two to the fireman,

who immediately descended from the cab and ran on ahead along the track until he was completely lost to sight.

"What 's the trouble?" said I somewhat apprehensively, as the engineer began examining his machinery.

"Oh, nothing," said he. "I 've just sent Bill ahead to see if the bridge is still there."

"Bridge? Still there?" I queried. "There 's nothing wrong with the bridges, I hope."

"Well — I dunno," said he. "Look over there," he added with a wave of his hand off to the left of us. I peered across the stream in the direction he had indicated, and there in the bright light of the moon I could see that two huge iron spans of the Santa Fé bridge had been completely undermined by the fierce flow of the waters, and now lay flat on their sides in midstream.

"Ooo-hoo! All right!" came the voice of the fireman from the dark ahead.

I sat transfixed and speechless as the engineer started slowly ahead and moved at a snail's pace along the soggy road. We came to the bridge, which was still standing, in a few moments; but oh how it swayed as we inched our way across! I

should have felt safer if that train and I were lying together in a hammock. We fairly lurched across it, and I should not have been at all surprised if at any moment the whole structure had collapsed under our weight. Finally we got across in safety, and my heart condescended to emerge from my boots.

"By George, Mr. Engineer!" said I. "If there 's any more like that, I guess I 'll get off and walk the rest of the way."

"All right, mister," said the engineer cheerfully. "If you prefer the company of rattlesnakes and Gila monsters to mine, go ahead — and may the Lord have mercy on your soul!"

I decided to remain.

VIII

CHAIRMEN I HAVE MET

SOMETIMES the Gentleman in the Chair is a Lady, but more often he is a man, and, strange to relate, contrary to the general impression of the comparative methods of the sexes, the ladies are vastly more direct in their introductions than their Brothers in Suffering. Women are seldom oratorically inclined. Men are invariably so — or at least chairmen are. And as a result an introduction to an audience by a woman is likely to become more of an "identification of the remains" than an illuminating explanation of the speaker's right to be where he is; while the men "pile it on" to such an extent that the lecturer has often to struggle immortally to make good the chairman's kindly declarations on his behalf.

Personally, with all due respect to the Lady Chairman, I prefer the masculine method: not because I like to hear myself exalted to the tipmost

point of the blue vault above; for I do not. It is hard work to sit still before five hundred people with a smug expression of countenance and hear oneself compared to Dickens and Thackeray, and Shakespeare and Moses, to the distinct disadvantages of that noble quartet of literary strugglers; and I have never ceased to sympathize with Anthony Hope, who on a postprandial occasion some years ago when I was sitting next to him, after listening to a few eulogistic remarks by a speaker in which he was made to appear the greatest Light of Literature since the beginning of time, lifted the tablecloth, glanced under it, and in a muffled tone murmured, "My God, Bangs! Is n't there any way out of here? I cawn't live up to all this!"

Nevertheless, I do prefer the men's method, because it gives me more time in which to study my audience, and, in so far as I may, adjust myself and my discourse to the special problem confronting me. In the one case (introductions by women) it is as if one were suddenly seized by the scruff of the neck and thrown overboard without even time to say one's prayers; in the other the victim is slowly and pleasantly carried upward

from the level of fact on the wings of kindly fancy to a pinnacle of unearned increment of glory, and left there to shift for himself: to soar higher if he have afflatus enough to attain loftier heights, or to slide back to where he belongs as gracefully as may be.

"Pile it on so thick that the lecturer has to struggle hard to make good."

I have often thought as I have sat and listened to these delightful flights of eulogy — so like the obituary notices we read in the newspapers after a great man dies — of the great disadvantages of those upper realms. It is very lonely and cold up there, and while the old saw is undoubtedly correct, and there *is* plenty of room at the top, let it be recorded by one who has more than once been summarily hauled thither as involuntarily as undeservedly, that it is elbow room only, with mighty little solid earth on which to rest one's feet. The

poet who invented the expression "the giddy heights" knew what he was talking about, and one has but to go out on the lecture platform and try to stand gracefully on those abstract peaks to have it proved to his entire satisfaction.

But there is another reason why I prefer the chair-*man* to the chair-*woman*, and it has to do solely with the technic of lecturing. No one who has ever lectured can deny the apprehension of the first five minutes of the effort. Those five minutes are perhaps the most critical period of the evening. If the attack is not right, the whole affair is likely to come down with a crash; for first impressions count perhaps more than they should with the average audience. If the attack is good, and the lecturer can "make himself solid" with his audience at the very beginning, structural weaknesses and an occasional dull or dragging moment will be forgiven later, because those who listen have come to like the speaker personally, and decline to let him fail unless he really insists upon doing so.

Now the technic of this attack, I should say if I were retained to write a Primer for Lecturers, involves the chairman most materially. He is the

tangible hook on which the alert lyceumite almost invariably either hangs or supports himself in those first five minutes. Human nature is so constituted that people like a pleasantry at the expense of some person or of some thing with which they are personally familiar. It grows out of the love of the concrete — which is a failure of us all, I fancy — and in every community there are always at least two concrete things that are sure winners for the lecturer — the chairman of the evening, and the railway system upon which the inhabitants of the community depend. Jests broad or subtle at the expense of either are received with howls of joy.

On my first transcontinental trip, made ten years ago, I never failed to receive an immediate response from my audiences when I referred to the letters N. P. R. R., the abbreviated form for the Northern Pacific Railroad, as really signifying a "Not Particularly Rapid Route"; and in other sections of the country served by those charming corporations the shortest cut I know to the affections of the people is through a bald or ribald jest at the expense of the Erie or the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad.

The chairman, however, is an equally safe proposition. He is either a very popular man in town, or directly the reverse, and in either case his neighbors enjoy a little joke at his expense. Naturally the joke, to be successful, must have to do with something peculiar to the moment, which the lecturer must find in the chairman's opening remarks. Obviously one cannot be so freely facetious with a woman as with a man, and if he has been properly brought up does not even wish to be so. So that the Lady Chairman invariably leaves the speaker with a restricted field of operations at the outset.

Of course in all these reflections I am speaking merely of the lecturer who seeks popular rather than academic favor, which is frankly my own case. I should infinitely prefer to find myself liked by a miscellaneous audience rather than by a limited company of scientificos who are professionally more interested in things of the head than of the heart. It is better to be human than great, and I care more for Humanity than for the Humanities.

At a rough estimate I should say that in the last ten years I have been the beneficiary of the

services of not less than eight hundred chairmen, and in that whole list I can recall but one that I did not like, and no doubt he was a most likable fellow. He was a clergyman and a man of information, if not education; but he seemed to think that because somebody had once intimated that I was a "humorist" (a title that I have neither laid claim to, nor specially desired to win) I must naturally be reached only by a downward climb from his own dignified heights. There are individuals in this world who conceive humor to be a somewhat undignified pursuit, their own education in that branch of human action having been confined to a study of the antics of the circus clown, and they are likely to deny to humorists even the right to the use of correct English.

"Well," said this special chairman unctuously when we met for the first time, "you are from New York, I understand."

"I have been a New Yorker," I said noncommittally.

"I suppose you know Howells, and Mark Twain, and all that *bunch?*" he went on, condescending to use the kind of language with which he of course assumed I was most familiar.

And it was just there that I took a violent dislike to the man. The word *bunch*, as applied to Mr. Howells and Mark Twain by one of his presumed education was not pleasing to my soul, though I should have loved it from a cowboy. It was as if somebody had referred to "those talented *cusses*, Carlyle and Emerson," and I simmered slightly within.

"Well," I replied, "I 've known Howells and his gang for ages — bunked with the whole kit and caboodle of 'em for nearly twenty years — and you can take it from me they 're a nifty herd! But the other — who was the other man?"

"Mark Twain," said he.

"I seem to have heard the name somewhere," said I; "but I don't think I 've ever met him, or at least I don't remember it. New York 's a pretty big place, you know, and you can't be expected to know everybody. What was his line?"

I am not sure, but I think the reverend gentleman woke up at that point. At any rate he gave me no clue as to Mark Twain's identity. He turned away, and excused himself on the ground that he wanted to see if the audience was "all in."

"Don't bother," I called after him. "It will be *all in* when I get through with it."

But he never cracked a smile. I presume there were refinements of slang with which he was not familiar.

As to the others, however, I find as I run the noble army over in retrospect that many have won their way into my affections, and none are remembered save pleasantly. Several of them stand out preëminently for acts of self-sacrificing kindness on my behalf; notably one gentleman in Iowa who drove me over a distance of eighteen miles after midnight through a raging blizzard, requiring the unremitting efforts of four sturdy horses to pull us through, in order that I might catch a train back East and be with my children at Christmas time, and he was not a particularly emotional man, or anything of a sentimentalist, at that.

I shall never forget the spur of his answer to a remark I made to him that night on our way from the hotel to the lecture hall. The snow was falling lightly when he arrived, but the distance to the hall was so short that we walked it. As we came to the public square I noticed that hitched

to the white railing about the county courthouse that stood in the middle thereof were some thirty or forty teams, harnessed to farm wagons of various types, large and small. It was already after eight o'clock, and I was surprised to find the wagons there at so late an hour.

"Your people work late, Mr. Robb," said I, as we sauntered along.

"What do you mean by that?" he inquired.

"Why," said I, "those wagons over there. Is n't it a trifle late for your farmers to be in town?"

"Oh," he said, "those wagons — why no, Mr. Bangs. Those wagons are here for pleasure, not on business. They have brought in a good part of your audience. Some of your people to-night have driven in from as far as twenty miles to hear you."

My heart sank. "Great Scott!" I ejaculated. "Twenty miles, eh? On a night like this — I — I hope I 'll be good enough for that."

"*I hope so!*" was his laconic response.

The rejoinder was as the prick of a spur, and by its aid, as well as with the assistance of a delightfully receptive gathering of listeners who had

traveled far to have a good time, and meant to have it anyhow — a characteristic of your Westerner — we pulled through in good condition.

When all was over this noncommittal Iowan bundled me up in a borrowed fur overcoat, and insisted on taking that all-night drive with me through the raging storm that I might be sent safely and rejoicing back to my youngsters awaiting my coming on the Atlantic coast. It was shortly after four in the morning when my train drew out of the distant station, and the last I saw of my kindly host he was standing on the railway platform, knee deep in the snow, in the spotlight of a solitary white electric lamp, hat in hand, and waving his farewells and good wishes for me and mine.

I rejoice to say that he has remained my friend over the eight or nine years that have since elapsed, and if by any chance he shall read these lines I trust they will serve to prove to him that my affection, as frequently expressed in my letters to him, is still quite as strong and as deep as one with his capacity for friendliness could possibly wish it to be. And I wish to add that his figure as it stands out in my memory has become a sym-

bol to me of the kindness, and courtesy, and friendliness of the great-hearted people who dwell in what he and his fellows properly and pridefully refer to always as "God's Own Country."

Another Iowa chairman, whose charming companionship and courtesy I shall always remember, will not mind, I am sure, if I record here a most amusing "break" that he made at our first meeting, which, I hasten to add, he more than redeemed afterward when the stress and strain of the evening relaxed. He dwelt in what appeared to be a most flourishing little city in the northern part of the State. I had arrived there early in the afternoon, and was so much impressed by the clean-cut appearance of every-

"The last I saw of my kindly host."

thing I saw that I lingered upon the streets long after I should have sought my couch to rest up for the evening. The streets were as clean as a whistle. The dwellings were attractive in design and setting, and the business blocks were of a dignified if not massive style of architecture. Best of all, if I could judge from those I saw to-ing and fro-ing upon the streets, the people themselves were alert and active.

In view of all this apparent prosperity I was a trifle surprised when the chairman arrived at the hotel to find him rather depressed. He was a clergyman, and at first glance seemed to be suffering from profound melancholy; so very profound indeed that I deemed it my duty to try to cheer him up.

"What a fine, prosperous little city you have here, Doctor," said I with genuine enthusiasm. "I 've put in the greater part of the afternoon looking the place over, and I tell you it has filled me with joy."

"Humph!" said he gloomily. "It looks prosperous, but — *it ain't!* It 's a bank-made town. The banks got here first, and induced people to come and settle on easy terms, and the terms

have n't turned out quite so easy as they might. There 's hardly a man in this town that is n't up to his chin in debt."

" Oh, well, what of that? " said I, still resolved to win out on a tolerably hopeless proposition. " Of course debt is a bad thing; but sometimes it acts as a spur. Your people are a bright and brainy looking lot. It won't take them long to settle up."

" Oh, they look bright and brainy," he returned sadly; " but *they ain't!* There is n't one man in ten 'll understand a half of what you say to them to-night."

" Look here, Doctor! " said I, beginning to wax a trifle chilly myself, especially in the regions of my pedal extremities. " What are you trying to do, discourage me? "

" Oh, no," he replied, with a mournful shake of his head. " If I 'd been trying to discourage you, I 'd have told you about our lecture hall. It 's without any exception the meanest thing of its kind on the American continent. Why," he added, holding out his hands in a gesture of utter despair, " why, if we had a lecture hall that was only halfway decent, *we could afford to have some-*

body out here to talk to us that would be worth listening to!"

The chairman who in the exuberance of his own eloquence forgets the name of the individual he is introducing, even though he has announced that that name is a "household word," is no creature of the imagination, and if the stories that are told of him seem hackneyed, it is not because they are so frequently told, but because they happen so frequently in the experience of all platform speakers, and in almost identical manner. Even so well known a man as Mr. Bryan has suffered from this, one enthusiastic admirer in New York having once, after a skyscraping peroration, led up with climacteric force to the name of "our Peerless Leader, *William J. Brennings.*"

In my own platform experience I have had chairmen come to me at the last moment and confess with most childlike frankness that they have never heard of me before, asking me to help them out because they really did n't know "what in Tophet to say." One individual out on the Pacific Coast approached me one night about ten minutes before the lecture was scheduled to begin,

and revealed to me his terrible embarrassment over this latter situation.

"I did n't know until half an hour ago that I was to present you to our people to-night," said he, "and to tell the honest truth, Mr. Bangs, *I never heard of you before.* Will you please tell me *who* you are, and *what* you are, and *why* you are? And is there anything pleasant I can say about you in introducing you to your audience?"

"Well," said I, "if I had known I was to have the privilege of preparing the obituary notice you are to deliver over my prostrate remains while I lie in state upon the platform to-night, I should have written out something that would have been mighty proud reading for the little Bangses when I sent marked copies of to-morrow morning's papers back East to show them what a great man their daddy is in the West. But I have n't time to tell you the whole story of my past life, and there are certain sections of it I would n't tell you if I had. I have been a Democrat in New York and a Republican in Maine."

"You might at least make a suggestion or two to help me out, though," he pleaded.

"Oh, yes," said I, "there are plenty of pleas-

ant things you can say about me. In the first place, you can tell that audience that —"

"Hold on a moment, Mr. Bangs," he interrupted, raising his hand to stop me. "Just one minute, please! *You 've got to remember that I am a clergyman and must speak the truth!*"

I resolved to let him go his own gait, and comforted him by telling him he could say whatever he pleased, and that I would "stand for it."

And I must confess he acquitted himself nobly. In his hands I became one of the Princes of Letters, the titles of whose many books were too well known to need any enumeration of them there, and as for my name — why, it would be an impertinence for him even to mention it, "because, my friends," said he, "I am perfectly well aware that that name is *as familiar to you as it is to me.*"

Another good gentleman in the South, summoned to do duty as chairman at the last moment, sought no aid either from myself or from "Who's Who," trusting, like the good Christian he was, utterly to Holy Writ. He began most impressively with selections from the Book of Genesis. "In the beginning God created the earth," said he, and then he ran lightly over the sequences of cre-

ated things until he had ushered the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and the fishes of the sea on to the stage, and thence with an easy jump he came to myself.

"And then, my friends," he said, with an impressive pause, "the Creator felt that He should create something to have dominion over all these things that He knew were good — a creature of heart, a creature of soul, a creature of in-till-ect, and so He made man. My friends, it is such a one that we have with us to-night who will speak to you upon his own subject as only he can do. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you the speaker of the evening, who is too well known to you all to need any further eulogy on my part."

The good gentleman then retired to a proscenium box at the right of the stage, where he at once proceeded to fall asleep, and snored so lustily that everybody in the house was delighted, including myself — although, to tell the truth, I envied him his nap, for I was immortally tired.

One of the dearest of my chairmen was a fine old gentleman in West Virginia, to meet and know whom was truly an inspiration. He was a profound scholar, and had enjoyed the rare privilege

in a long and useful life of knowing intimately some of the demigods of American literature. His reminiscences of Emerson, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, and Longfellow, and Hawthorne, and others of our most brilliant literary epoch, were a delight to listen to, and I was sorry when the time came for us to go out upon the platform. It would have been a greater treat for that audience to listen to him than to me, and I heartily wished we might exchange places for the moment. Like a great many others of my chairmen, this gentleman experienced some difficulty in getting the title of my lecture, "Salubrities I Have Met," straight in his mind. More than once during our little chat together he would pause and say:

"What is the title of your talk again? It has slipped my mind."

"Sal-u-bri-ties I Have Met," I would say.

"Tell me again — is it Salubrities or Celebrities?" he would ask.

"Salubrities," I would reply. And then I would spell it out for him, "S-A-L-U-B-R-I-T-I-E-S, Salubrities. Not in any case Celebrities, or you will spoil my opening."

"I 'll try to remember it," he would say, with

a mistrustful shake of his head as if he feared it was impossible. "It 's rather elusive, you know."

"Perhaps I had better write it down on a slip of paper," I said at the last.

"Oh, no," he replied. "I think I have it now — Salubrities, Salubrities, Salubrities — yes — I — I think I have it."

We walked out upon the platform, and the dear old gentleman began a short address so filled with witty and pleasant things that I have ever since wished I could have had a stenographer present to take it down in shorthand. It would have formed an excellent standard of conduct and achievement worthy of any man's striving. And then he came to my subject.

"And to-night, ladies and gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Bangs has come to us to give us his famous lecture on — ahem — on — er — he has come, I say, to give us his inimitable talk on — er — on — er —"

I leaned forward, and tried to give it to him in a stage whisper; but was too late. His impetus carried him on to destruction

"— his delightful talk on Lubricators He Has Met," said he.

Without any jealousies let me confess that that observation was truly the hit of the evening. The bulk of the audience had been themselves so mystified by the possible significance of the word Salubrities that they knew the title by heart, and we began the evening with a roar of laughter that made us all friends at once. And as a matter of fact no harm was done; for "Lubricators I Have Met" was quite as good a title as the other, for my Salubrities are men and women who have made the world happier, and better, and sweeter, by their kindliness and graciousness, and what in the world could be more fitting than that the people who do that should be called Lubricators?

IX

CHANCE ACQUAINTANCES

THE delightful author of that most appealing story, "The Friendly Road," had only to scratch the surface of things a little to find many a golden nugget of friendliness and courtesy in the mines of the human spirit. As I look back on my many thousands of miles of travel in this country I find myself able to say with equal confidence that on the Roads of Steel, and the lanes tributary thereto, where few of us would think to look for such things, I too have found my golden nuggets without more than half-trying to find them. I have already spoken of my friends among the trainmen, to whose fidelity and watchful care I have owed my safe transit and my comfort in many a long and weary stretch. They have been an abundant source of happiness to me; but there have been others still, in whose wit and fraternal companionship, and illuminating discourse, I have

found both pleasure and profit. Many of these have been the chance acquaintances of the smoker and the observation car en route.

It does not happen often here in the East that we make friends "by rail." Possibly it is because the distances traversed are comparatively short. Perhaps too it is due to the Eastern Reserve, which is a State of Mind, just as the Western Reserve has become several States of Being. I know that the democratic Westerner traveling in the East finds us apparently cold and unresponsive; though I doubt we are really so. We are merely hurried, and possibly worried; too preoccupied to notice the many little opportunities for friendly intercourse that a railway journey presents.

It is my own impression that the distance to be traveled has largely to do with this difference of manner between the Eastern man and his brother from the West. The average Easterner who has never penetrated the West farther than Sandy Hook has no real conception of the magnificence of those distances about and beyond the Mississippi Valley. At times when for reasons of business or pleasure I have gone from my home in Maine to my encampment in New York, between

the hours of six P.M. on a Tuesday, say, and six A.M. of the following Wednesday, I have passed through six separate American commonwealths: but in those Far Western stretches I have time and again spent my full twenty-four hours upon the road without in any wise finding myself subject to the rules and regulations of the Interstate Commerce Commission.

Out of this rises, naturally enough, a difference in attitude toward one's fellow travelers. There comes to be a greater sense of a settled community interest on the longer journey, which brings with it greater inclination for social intercourse with one's neighbors of the sleeper.

One of the conspicuous results of my contact with humanity on the road has been that I have come to hold a very high respect for the traveling man; so high indeed that where ten years ago I should probably have spoken of him in the terms of our American vernacular as a drummer, I have now definitely ejected that word from my vocabulary, save in its narrower meaning as applied to that overnoisy person who beats that most unmusical musical instrument, the drum, in our modern bands. These commercial travelers average

high in character and in intellect, and the man who keeps his ears open while in their company can hardly fail to learn much from their discourse. The best of them know their own special lines from the ground up, and if my observation of them is correct the very least of them are authorities on human nature.

I do not wish to boast, but I think that if some emergency should arise requiring me to prepare offhand an article on suspenders, straw hats, automobiles, or canned tomatoes, I could qualify as an apparent authority, anyhow, from things I have heard directly from the good fellows pursuing those particular lines, or have overheard in their chats with others, in the smoking cars. More than once I have left a symposium conducted by a group of these gentlemen almost obsessed with the notion that our universities might be better qualified to do their real work in life if the average college professor were able to "get his stuff over" as humanly, as clearly, as entertainingly, and as effectively as do the bulk of these advance agents of the American industrial world. They are, according to their several capacities, full of their subject, saturated with it, enthusiastic over it, and wholly

unreluctant when they get even half a chance to reveal their knowledge to a ready listener.

I have met men on the road who were as eloquent on the subject of men's underwear as I should like to be on the necessity of a cheerier spirit in meeting the trials of life, and one effervescent soul on a Pacific Coast trip once held me and mine spellbound by his remarkable disquisition on the spiritual influence of comfortable shoes, talking for a longer time than I have ever yet listened willingly to a sermon on some seemingly less homely topic. And as authorities on the state of the nation, political, commercial, and spiritual — well, any kind of administration, Republican, Democratic, Progressive, would not do badly were it to summon a congress of these individuals to meet annually at Washington, to confer with it, to inform it, and to lay before it anything having directly or remotely to do with "things as is."

They are by nature diplomats, by instinct orators, and of necessity they are profound students of human nature. They have to be adaptable to circumstance, ready of resource, and full of tolerance. I take off my hat to them, and heartily congratulate the business interests of the United States to-

day upon the high character and quality of manhood of this splendid army in the field of commerce.

One of these good fellows several years ago enlivened me for many weary hours on a tedious journey from Kansas City to Minneapolis. The journey was full of annoying mishaps, thanks to a habit some of our Southern and Western railway people have, lacking roses and other fresh flowers, of strewing freight wrecks in my path. It is an expensive tribute; but I would willingly go without it.

On this occasion my friend and I dined together, breakfasted together, characterized our luck in a beautiful commingling of strong language together, and together we watched the painfully slow operations of the train wreckers removing that tributary debris from the tracks. He was buoyant and undismayed by trial, and for hours he orated eloquently upon his subject, which happened to be straw hats. When he got through, had I taken notes, I could have qualified for a University degree upon that subject if I had sought an S. T. D. (Doctor of Straw Tiling).

The vast gulf that separates the near-Panama from the real thing became perfectly clear to me

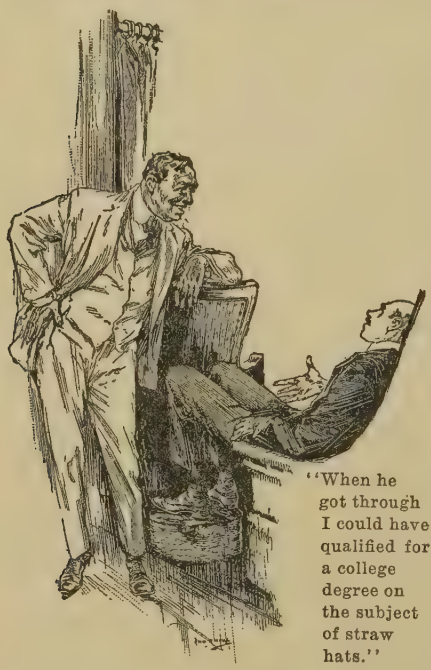
then, if it had never been so before, and I knew how it had come about that a New Yorker could buy a Panama hat for two dollars and fifty cents on Eighth avenue which on Fifth avenue would cost him ten dollars; and why a three-dollar Leghorn purchased in Chicago was inferior to a ninety-five dollar Leghorn manufactured in Newark, New Jersey, was made so obvious that I have worn neither since. His discourse was lucid, picturesque, convincing, and so completely comprehensive that women's hats became no more of a mystery to me than are those which our truck horses wear in midsummer with their ears sticking up through holes in the crown. As we drew near our destination I suddenly observed a smile breaking out on his lips, and a decided twinkle in his eye.

"Good Lord!" said he. "I 've only just realized that I have been talking you deaf, dumb, and blind for nearly twenty-four straight hours, without giving you a chance to slide in a word edgewise. I hope I have n't made you think life 's nothing but a hat to me?"

"On the contrary," said I, "I 've learned a lot. You 've made life worth living."

"I get so infernally interested in my business,"

said he apologetically, "that sometimes I don't realize that maybe the other fellow has something to say too. I meant to have asked you this morning, but I forgot. What 's your line? "



"When he got through I could have qualified for a college degree on the subject of straw hats."

I was seized with a jocular impulse, and I answered instantly "Natural gas."

He looked at me with a puzzled expression. "Natural gas? " he repeated. "That 's a queer business. How do you make deliveries? "

"Come around to the lecture hall with me tonight and I 'll show you," said I.

He threw his head back and roared with laughter. "By George! the dinner 's on me!" he said.

He accompanied me to the hall that evening, and sitting in the front row gazed at me quizzically all through my labors — full of sympathy and understanding, however — and after the affair was over and he joined me for my return journey to the hotel he slapped me hard on the back.

"Some gas, all right!" said he. "I would n't blow that out if I could!"

Which I took to be one of the most genuine compliments I have ever received.

I have never in any of my trips felt myself in danger of assassination, and yet one of these chance acquaintances of mine involved me by his love of practical joking in an implied ultimatum from a stranger of a most awe-inspiring nature. In leaving a California city some years ago I found myself seated with a group of other travelers just inside the rear door of the observation car. The train had come to a sudden standstill alongside a row of flourishing olive trees, and the traveling man (if I remember correctly he was to Suspenders what Darwin was to the Origin of Species) jumped from the platform and plucked a handful of their

fruit from branches overhanging the border of the road. Three of these he passed in to me, and in the innocence of my young heart I immediately plumped one of them into my mouth, and bit into it.

The result I shall not attempt to describe. Our dictionaries have at least a dozen separate and distinct terms signifying that which is bitter, no single one of which is adequate even to intimate the taste of that olive. There are such expressions as "gall and wormwood"; there are adjectives involving such qualifications of taste as "acrid," "nauseous," "sharp," "tangy," "stinging," "rough," and "gamy." None suffices. I have tasted rue, I have tasted aloes, I have tasted quassia, and I have nearly died of squills. As a small boy I once started in to chew a four-grain quinine pill that had been rolled with no ameliorating ingredient to take off the tang of it. But never in my life before or since have I tasted anything comparable to that olive for pure, unadulterated acerbity. It was an Ossa of Gall piled on a Pelion of Wormwood — I might say that it represented the complete reunion of that Gall which the historians of the past have told us

was "divided into three parts"— and I suffered accordingly.

But when I saw that traveling man's eye full of twinkling joy fixed upon me I resolved not to let him know that the horrid thing was not the most exquisite bit of ambrosial sweetness that had ever been perpetrated upon my paralyzed palate. I simply chewed quietly ahead, externally as calm and as placid as any cow that ever fletcherized her cud.

"How is it?" asked another traveler, sitting alongside me.

"Delicious!" said I. "Have one."

And I handed him over one of my two remaining olives. He was as innocent as I, but not quite so self-controlled. Even as I had done, he too plumped the olive into his mouth, bit into it — and forthwith exploded. I shall not repeat here the appeal to Heaven that issued from his lips along with the offending olive itself. Suffice it to say that although there were several ladies present it was verbally adequate. And then out of the depths of the car, from a physical giant lolling at ease in a plush-covered arm chair, came a deep, basso-profundo voice.

"*I 'd kill any man who did that to me!*" it said, with a vicious aspirate at the beginning of the word kill.

But there was no murder done, and before night as our train rolled over into Nevada we were as happy a family as one will be likely to find under any kind of roof in the far-off days of the millennium.

It is not often that we look for fine literary and other distinctions in the minds of men engaged in the humbler pursuits of life, and yet from two of my chance acquaintances en route, both barbers, I have gathered subtleties of line that have remained with me impressively ever since. The first of these worthy toilers and subconscious philosophers I discovered in a Chicago hotel in 1905. I was on my way into Iowa for a week of one-night stands, having come almost directly from one of the most delightful of my literary opportunities — Colonel George Harvey's dinner in honor of Mark Twain's seventieth birthday.

The stains of travel needed to be removed, and I sought the aid of the hero of my tale, a stocky little chap, whose face suggested an ancestry part Spanish and part East Side New York. I will say

that judged externally I should not have cared to meet him in a dark alley after midnight; but inwardly he turned out to be a pretty good sort of fellow. His speech was pure vernacular.

As he was cutting my hair I glanced over the supplement to that week's issue of "Harper's Weekly," at that time under Harvey's control, devoted to a full account of the Mark Twain dinner both in picture and in text. In turning over the leaves to see what kind of melon-shaped head the flashlight photographer had given me I came upon the counterfeit presentment of the group of which I had been a member, and was relieved to find that the print had treated me fairly well, and that instead of looking like a cross between a professional gambler and a train robber, as most of my published portraits have made me appear, the thing was recognizable, and in certain unsuspecting quarters might enable me to pass as a reputable citizen. The snipping of the scissors back of my ear suddenly ceased as I gazed upon my alleged "liniments"— as an old friend of mine used to call them — and the barber's voice broke the stillness.

"Say," he said, pointing with the scissors point

to the portrait of myself, "that guy looks sump'n like you, don't he?"

"He ought to," said I. "Me and him 's the same guy."

"Well whaddyer know about that!" he ejaculated. "Really?"

"Yep," said I.

"And you 're from New York, eh?" he went on, resuming his labors. "What 's the name?"

I enlightened him, and received the inevitable question.

"Whaddyer think of Chicago?"

It had happened that every visit I had made to Chicago for several years had shown that city almost completely hidden beneath a pall of sooty cloud and lake fog; so I answered him accordingly.

"Why, I like Chicago very much," said I, "very much indeed; but there is room for improvement here, of course. For instance, Chicago is dark, and gloomy, and cold. Now over in New York," I added, "we have a little round, yellow ball that is hauled up into the sky out of the wilds of Long Island every morning, and it is so arranged that it moves in a perfect semicircle through the sky at the rate of about sixty seconds a minute. It is a

wonderful invention. It sheds light on everything, on everybody, and sort of warms things up for us, and unlike most things in New York it does n't cost anybody a cent. Best of all, when the day is over, and we want things darkened up a bit so that we can go to sleep, the little ball sinks out of sight over on the western side of the city."

"Aw go wan!" he put in. "I know what you mean — you mean the sun."

"Yes," said I; "that 's just what we call it. You 've evidently heard of it before — but why don't you have something of the kind out here?"

His reply was a mixture of a snort and a sniff.

I then went on my journey into Iowa, and at the end of about ten days was back in Chicago once more, and in need of further renovation I again sought the assistance of my tonsorial friend. After a cordial greeting he said:

"Say — I told my wife how I 'd fixed you up the other day, and *she 'd heard of you before.* You wrote a book called 'Tea and Coffee' once, did n't cha?"

"Something like that," I replied. "It was called 'Coffee and Repartee.'"

"Well, anyhow, whatever the thing was called, she 'd read it," said the barber.

"I have met two other people who have done the same thing and lived; so don't worry," I observed.

"Whaddyer suppose she ast me?" he queried.

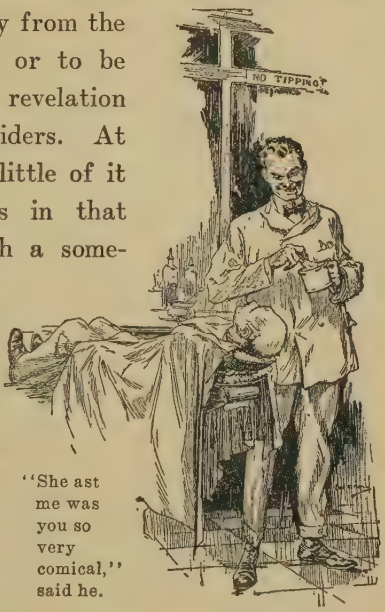
"I give it up," said I. "What?"

"She ast me," said he, "was you so very comical, and I told her no, *he ain't so damned comical, but he 's a hell of a kidder!*"

I may be wrong, but it has ever since seemed to me that there was a particularly nice distinction involved in this spontaneous estimate of my character, and it may be that a great many of our American humorists, so called, would be more aptly described as *kidders*. Our guying propensities, and the tongue-in-the-cheek style of humor so prevalent to-day, suggest the thought anyhow that the term *kidder* is more discriminating than that of *humorist*, as signifying the qualities of a Cervantes, a Rabelais, a Swift, or a Mark Twain.

It was in a South Carolina barber shop that the second nicety came unexpectedly upon me. I had looked for a certain quaint philosophy and humor among the negroes of the South, and must confess to considerable disappointment in not finding much

of it. The picturesque article in the African line that has so delighted us in the fiction of our masters of the pen from the South seems either to have vanished completely from the face of the earth or to be a trifle shy in the revelation of itself to outsiders. At any rate I found little of it in my wanderings in that territory; although a somewhat disagreeable amount of self-conscious quaintness, "for revenue only," was not wanting among negroes encountered.



"She ast me was you so very comical," said he.

But this white barber, an anemic little man, whose lazy drawl and languid manner bespoke anything but independence of spirit, and in whose presence I instinctively thought of the term "white trash," gave me in full measure what I had looked for in the sons of Ham. After sitting in his chair

for a few minutes I mentioned casually that South Carolina had a "fine Governor," referring to an individual named Blease, who at that time, occupied the high seat at Columbia, and of whose gyroscopic talents I had yet to find a South Carolinian of standing who was proud.

"I ain't got no use fo' *Mistuh* Blease, suh," the man replied, stroking his razor up and down the strop with a vigor entirely out of keeping with his presumed character. If I had been a blind man, I should have felt sure he was a negro, such was his accent.

"I am sorry to hear that," said I. "It would be pleasant to find somebody in the State who has some use for him; but so far it all seems to be the other way."

"No, suh, I ain't got no use fo' him, suh," continued the barber. "I don't like his kind, suh. I have shaved *Mistuh* Blease many a time, suh, an' when he was runnin' fo' Governah he came in hyere most every day, suh. One mornin' I says to him, 'Mistuh Blease,' says I, 'you 'd ought to be a mighty proud man, suh, runnin' fo' Governah of South Cyarolina, suh, an' sure to git it. That 's an honah, suh,' I says, 'fo' yo' and yo' children

and yo' children's children to be proud of.' And what do you suppose he answered, suh? 'To Blank with the honah!' says he. 'What the blank do yo' suppose I caiah fo' the honah?'

"*And I 've nuvver give him the honah, suh; no, suh. Mis*-tuh Blease done got elected, and I 've shaved him twenty times since, suh; *but he 's nuvver had the honah from me, suh. I 've nuvver called him Governah yit, suh; but it 's been Mistuh Blease every time, suh!*"

It was when I was recovering from this loyal assertion of the little man's respect for the Commonwealth of his birth that the stillness of the shop was broken by the excited voice of a tall, lantern-jawed individual with a distinct type of accent, who came rushing in from the street.

"Anybody round hyah knows what it costs to beat up a niggah in this hyah State?" he cried.

I gasped, and the barber paused languidly in his ministrations, holding his razor poised like the sword of Damocles over my head, while he reflected.

"Why," said he, "I dunno aigsactly; but the las' time the co'hts decided the question I think it was ten dollahs, suh."

"All right," said the intruder, starting to the

door. "If it don't come to no moh'n ten dollahs, I 'll do it. Up home in Ferginia, where I come from, it never costs moh'n five; but I 'm willin' to go as high as fifteen. A coon down hyah at my bohdin' house done give my wife some back talk this mornin', *an if it don't cost moh'n fifteen dollahs I 'm gwine to throw the critter outen de winder!*"

X

HUMORS OF THE ROAD

IT appears to be the habit of every age to lament its own dearth of humor, and in our own time we have not been exempt from the charge that we have no humorists. It is my own candid opinion in respect to this matter that we are confronted by a paradox in that we have so many humorists that in effect we seem to have none; so much of humor that in the very surfeit of it its brilliance does not appear; in short, that because of the trees we cannot see the wood.

A period that has produced a Dooley, and an Ade, and an Irvin Cobb, and a Bert Leston Taylor, is surely not poor in humorous possessions of a scintillating character, whether we demand that our humor shall be a product of pure fun or of profoundly serious thinking. J. Montgomery Flagg in picture and in text is as much a master of effervescent foolery as ever was either John

Phœnix or Artemas Ward; and in the humor that is designed to interpret life itself I find an endless store of it in the works of Wallace Irwin, of Montague Glass, of Miss Edna Ferber, and of Mrs. Alice Regan Rice; the last two, by the way, forming a complete refutation of the preposterous notion that women are devoid of the sentiment that cheers but does not inebriate. And as for the wits, if Oliver Herford were as lonely among wits as he is unique, I should still feel that we were rich beyond measure in that form of humor which is for the most part intellectual, of the mind rather than of the emotions.

But even if the charge were true — which of course it is not — that we no longer have any purveyors of humor of the first class upon whom we may rely for a service as regular as is our supply of milk, butter, and eggs, we could still lay the flattering unction to our souls that American life is full of humor. If any one doubts the fact, let him throw himself headlong into the Lyceum Seas and find out from personal contact. To me it seems to crop up everywhere, and whether I travel north, south, east, or west I find it in great abundance — humor conscious, and humor uncon-

scious; humor of the mind, and humor of the heart, or pathos; humor of situation, and the humor involving a mere play upon words; humor in all its infinitely varied qualities, and of a character most appealing. Writing a short while ago of an alleged similar condition in another field of letters, that of lyric poetry, I permitted myself the following rather sentimental reflections:

No singers great are here to-day?
  Perhaps! Let the indictment stand.
I hear no strong voice on the way,
  No lilt from some immortal hand;
And yet as on the silver mere
  I float, and towering hillsides scan,
Deep in my heart I seem to hear
  Again the merry pipes of Pan.

No lyrics worthy of the name
  Are sung to-day by living men?
Perhaps! Yet naught is there of shame
  That we have not old Herrick's pen,
For as I wander 'neath these skies
  As fairly blue as skies can be
And gaze into two special eyes,
  All life a lyric is to me.

With equal truth and sincerity I could say much the same in respect to humor, and indeed I might properly even go further. I could not perhaps say that all Americans, or even many Amer-

icans, are lyrists; but I should not fall far short of the mark were I to say that most Americans are humorists. In my travels I come across occasional "nonconductors," as a clever woman of my acquaintance once called a certain social light who was as impervious to wit as is the rhinoceros to the sting of a gnat; but they are few and far between. For the most part I have found natural born humorists on nearly every bush.

In a previous chapter I have confessed to some disappointment in the quality of the humor of the negro as I have encountered it in Southern climes; but there have been, nevertheless, delightful rifts in that cloud. I recall an aged son of Ethiopia who called for me one wintry morning at four o'clock to drive me from my hotel at Greenville, South Carolina, to the railway station. He was a ragged old fellow, and with his snowy, wool-covered head composed a study in black and white worthy of the brush of any of our best limners of character. He was as communicative as he was ragged, and confided to me at the very beginning of our acquaintance that he had moved away from Charleston to become a resident of Greenville because down in Charleston he could n't eat "pohk"

(which I took to be pork) without having to take to his bed; while in the more salubrious climate of Greenville he could "swaller a whole ham at a settin', an' nebber hyear a woid from dat old ham forebber after." His name, he told me, was "mos' gin'rally George"; but he "war n't biggetty" about what people called him, since he was willin' to come "ef dey on'y jes' whistled."

The early morning hours were cold and dreary, and I found my fur-lined horse blanket, as I have come to call my faithful winter overcoat, none too warm. Noting George's rather inadequate provision against the chill winds, I advised him to wrap his dilapidated old lap-robe about his shoulders.

"Ah 'm all right, Boss," he replied. "Don't yo' worry erbout me. Dis yere old obercoat o' mine ain't much to look at; but hit 's on de job jes' de same." He gave a most amusing chuckle. "Yo 'd ought to hyear mah fambly takin' on erbout dis yere old obercoat!" he said. "Dey 's kind o' proudy folks, an' dey don't like it. Dey says hit don't look neat; but Ah tell 'um Ah 'm a gwine t' wear hit jes' de same, neat er no neat — *de undahtakah, he mek yo' look neat!*"

From which I deduced that George was not only a humorist, but in a fair way to qualify as a philosopher as well.

Two days later I happened to be at Atlanta, Georgia, over Lincoln's Birthday, and it pleased me beyond measure to find printed on the first page of one of the prominent daily newspapers of that beautiful city a three-column cut of Abraham Lincoln, with a suitable tribute in verse from one of America's leading syndicate poets. I had myself for reasons of taste, and in order to give no offense to my kindly hosts throughout the Southland, omitted from my discourse passing references to certain great figures of the Civil War; but on seeing this very notable recognition by his old-time adversaries of the great virtues of our martyred President, I hesitated no longer in respect to these references, and from that time on reverted to the original form of my talk.

After eating my breakfast on this morning of the eleventh I dallied for awhile in the office of the massive Georgian Terrace Hotel, smoking my cigar, and glancing over the news in the paper. As I was about to toss the paper aside a fine old type of your Southern gentleman seated himself

on the divan alongside of me, and in the usual courteous fashion of the country gave me a morning salutation. I responded in kind, and then tapping my paper observed:

"That is a fine picture of Lincoln."

"Yes, suh, a verruh fine picture, suh," he replied. "I never had the honah of seein' Mistuh Lincoln, suh; but from all I hyear, suh, he must have resembled that picture pretty close, suh."

"It is a delight to me to find it in one of your Southern newspapers," said I, "especially in one so influential in the South as this."

"Yes, suh," he answered. "It shows that the South is not slow to recognize genius, suh, wherever it is found, suh. But," he added, "there is no occasion for surprise, suh. We have always appreciated Mr. Lincoln's greatness down hyear, and we have admiahed him, suh; *though we have had reason to believe that durin' the late onpleasantness, suh, he was consid'rable of a No'thern sympathizah, suh.*"

Conspicuous in my memory for both his conscious wit and his unconscious humor is a strapping negro I encountered at a junction down in Alabama last winter. I was marooned there for

five weary hours, receiving at the hands of its natives as high a courtesy and as fearful food as I have ever yet had presented to me. The colored porter at the hotel had a face as black as the ace of spades, and as childlike and bland as it was black. He seemed to take a tremendous interest in me, especially in my fur overcoat, which he appeared to think must "ha cost as much as eight dollahs," and he plied me with questions as we stood on the railway platform waiting for my train into Birmingham for a full hour that nearly drove me to despair. I have not space for that illuminating interchange of ideas in all its verbal fullness; but part of it ran in this wise:

"Whar yo' come from?"

"Maine," said I.

"Maine?" he repeated. "What 's Maine?"

"Why, Maine — Maine is a State," said I. "And it 's a nice one too," I added.

"Oh, yaas," he said. "Hit 's ober yander, ain't it?" he continued, with a wave of his hand sweeping enough to take in the whole universe.

"Yes," said I, "away over yonder. It 's down East."

"Got any children?" he queried.

"Yes," said I, "I 've got two sons in Detroit, and —"

"Dee-troit, eh?" he interrupted. "Yaas, suh, Ah 've heerd o' Dee-troit. Dee-troit 's a nice State too — a mighty nice State — a nice State to have two sons at, Ah reckon. So yo' was born in Dee-troit, was yuh?"

"No," I replied, "I was n't born at Detroit; I was born at Yonkers —"

"O-o-oh! So yo' was born at Yonkers, was yuh? Yaas, suh — Yonkers! Ah don't know much erbout Yonkers; but Ah guess Yonkers is a nice State too, ain't it?"

"Well," I laughed, "yes — Yonkers is a pretty nice State too — what you might call a Comatose State; but —"

"Yaas, suh — Ah 've heern tell dat Yonkers was one o' dem cummytoe States, an' Ah guess dat 's a pretty good kind ob a State to be bohn in. What yo' sellin'?" This with a hasty glance at my suitcase.

"Brains," said I.

"Lawsy me! Sellin' brains, eh?" said he. "Waal, suh, Ah 'm sorry. Yo' look so kind o' set up Ah thought yo' was a-sellin' seegyars.

Yaas, suh — Ah 'd hoped yo' was." He gazed wistfully along the shining rails. "Dem seegyar drummahs is mighty free wid deir samples, suh," he continued, "and Ah been a hopin' yo 'd be able to spar' me a han'ful like de res' ob 'em does. But ef yo 're dealin' in brains, hit ain't *likely yo' got enough to gib any away.*"

I may add that his disappointment was short-lived; for before we parted I took him across to the general store that fronted on the railroad track, and by the judicious expenditure of a quarter bought him a supply of his favorite brand large enough to last him a week. A single one of them would have done for me forever.

Repartee has always been a characteristic gift of the American people, due no doubt to a political system that turns almost every community into a debating society at least once a year, and sometimes oftener. Readiness of verbal retort has thereby become an inheritance that grows richer in the squandering of it. It has been a quality so conspicuous that it has led a great many people, justly or otherwise, to assert that there are more really good jokes to be found in the course of a year in the columns of the "Congressional Rec-

ord" than in the cleverest of the world's comic papers. However this may be, I know that one of the zestful things about a lecturer's life is the jestful thing that lurks at his side almost everywhere he turns.

I have had many proofs of this in my own wanderings; some direct, and some at long range. An amusing instance of the long-range retort occurred some years ago when I found in my mail one morning a letter from a gentleman living in Wyoming, an entire stranger to me, who said that he had heard from a friend that I wrote after-dinner speeches for others as part of my professional work.

"If yo 're dealin' in brains, hit ain't likely yo' got enough to gib any away."

Somehow or other [he continued] I have managed to get a reputation as a wit which I don't deserve; but I've got to live up to it, or go under. Now it has occurred to me that since you are in the business of writing after-dinner speeches for others you might turn out three crackajacks for me.

So, without beating about the bush any longer, I want to ask you what you would charge me for three ripsnorters lasting about a half an hour each, speaking at the rate of a hundred and fifty words a minute, on the subjects of "'Our Glorious Comonwealth," "The Star-Spangled Banner," and "The Ladies." If your terms are not too high, I shall be glad to give you the order.

I cannot say whether my sensations upon reading this delightful communication were more of amazement or of amusement, but after due deliberation I decided to answer the letter in a facetious spirit.

I have your esteemed favor of Thursday last [I wrote], and beg to say that my regular charge for a single speech such as you require, suitable for delivery before a mixed gathering of ladies and gentlemen, has invariably been $1,000 in the past; but since your proposition is more or less on a wholesale basis, and business is slack, I will make an exception in your case and give you the special terms of $750 per, F. O. B. I must insist, however, that you regard these terms as strictly confidential; for it might involve me in serious complications if Mr. Choate, and Gen. Horace Porter, and Senator Blank were to learn that I was cutting rates. They have been among my best customers for many years, and for their own sakes, as well as for my own, I do not wish to lose their trade.

This letter, which I felt tolerably sure would end the matter once and for all, was mailed, and within a week brought me the following telegraphic response:

If you write Senator Blank's speeches, I don't want one from you at any price.

It added not a little to the poignancy of this retort that the telegram was sent " collect."

Another example of ready American facetiousness cheered a dull day for me last year in Tennessee. I was booked to lecture before a charming collegiate community at Blue Mountain, Mississippi, and to get there from Memphis was required to make a railway connection at a curious little town called Middleton. Middleton was an amazing concoction of piccaninnies, waste paper, inactive whites, and germ suggestion. Mr. Goldberg, the cartoonist, would probably have referred to it if he had been along with me as the town that put the Junk in Junction, and upon its dilapidated railway platform I was compelled to wait for six mortal hours, hungry and thirsty, but fearing to assuage the one or quench the other for fear of internal complications beyond the reach of medical science. If I had never believed in the hookworm before, I became an abject coward in the fear of it then.

Middleton's chief excuse for being appeared to be that it was the terminus of a featherbed affair

called the New Orleans, Mobile & Chicago Railway, possibly in ironic reference to the fact that as far as I could learn it did not touch any point within two hundred miles of any one of those cities. I imagine that the mileage of the New Orleans, Mobile & Chicago Railway, or at least that particular section of it, was somewhere between thirty-seven and thirty-eight miles linear measure; though in the matter of jolting, careening, sliding, skidding, and galumphing along generally, its emotional mileage was incalculable, and the effect of a ride from Middleton at one end to New Albany at the other on the liver surpassed that of all the great transcontinental systems rolled into one.

From what I could gather in casual conversation with such bureaus of information as were available at Middleton its trains ran anywhere from twenty-seven hours to a year and six months late. I will say on behalf of its management, however, that after trying it once I concluded that it was a miracle it ran at all. Three or four times in the course of my waiting I decided to give up the quest of Blue Mountain altogether and to return to Memphis; but hope has always sprung eternal in my breast, and each resolution to quit the

game was superseded by some kind of optimistic spiritual reassurance that held me true to my obligations.

Ultimately my optimism was justified, and a panting little combination of whirring wheels and iron rust wheezed into view, dragging a passenger car of I should say the vintage of 1852, and a shamefully big and modern freight car after it. A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Locomotives would have had everybody connected with the institution indicted then and there, and I was again strongly inclined to give up my effort to get through. It seemed the very height of inhumanity to ask that poor little engine to carry my added weight. I should have much preferred to lift it tenderly in my arms from the track, and put it into the freight car, and pull the train to Blue Mountain myself; at any rate, that seemed the most reasonable and the only really kind thing to do at the moment.

Nevertheless I boarded the train, having first invested fifty cents in twenty-fours' worth of postal card accident insurance at the ticket office window and mailed it to my executors. In a couple of hours we were sliding and bumping down grade

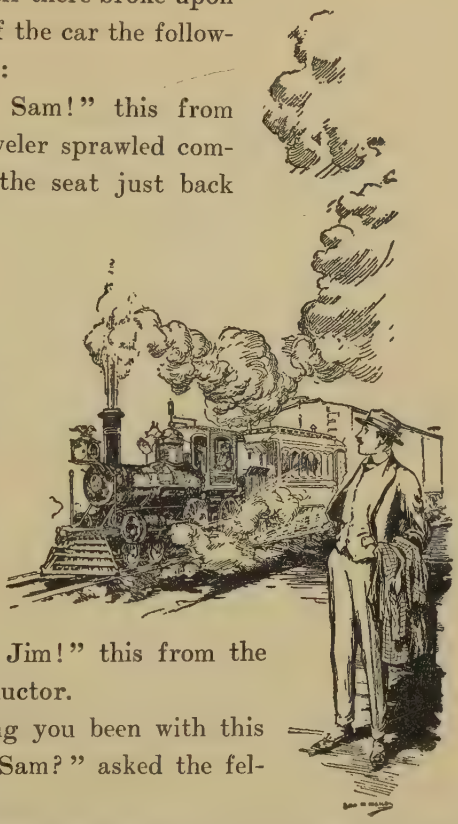
through an oozy morass over tracks ballasted with something having the consistency of oatmeal mush liberally diluted with skim milk. We slid over the first half-mile in about fifteen seconds, thanks to the weight of that shameless freight car at the rear, which pushed the rest of us along at a terrific rate of speed; but things were averaged up when we came to an upgrade, which, on a rough estimate, I should say we accomplished at the rate of about a mile a week. After awhile the conductor appeared — a nice, genial, kindly soul, who inspired me with a confidence I had not yet managed to acquire in the road itself. He was so smiling and serenely unaffected by what loomed dark as dangers to me that I was soon feeling rather ashamed of myself for being so full of coward fears, and it was not long before in my mind I was singing those beautiful lines of Browning:

> The year's at the spring,
> And day's at the morn;
> Morning's at seven;
> The hillside's dew-pearled;
> The lark's on the wing;
> The snail's on the thorn;
> God's in his heaven —
> All's right with the world!

And as I was humming this comforting assur-

ance to myself there broke upon the silence of the car the following colloquy:

"Howdy, Sam!" this from a fellow traveler sprawled comfortably in the seat just back of me.



"A Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Locomotives would have had them indicted then and there."

"Howdy, Jim!" this from the smiling conductor.

"How long you been with this hyere road, Sam?" asked the fellow traveler.

"Seven years last March, Jim," replied the conductor.

"*My Gord, Sam!*" cried the fellow traveler,

sitting up. "*This must be your second trip!*"

As for subtle humor of a rather sly sort, perhaps the best example I know of was a little jest perpetrated at the expense of one to whom I shall refer as my Only Muse, who, I rejoice to say, accompanies me upon most of my trips. She was with me once in Iowa when we were stranded at an interesting little railway crossing for several hours. The place consisted wholly of some stockyards, a general store, and a small wooden cot which passed for a hotel, in which we found every comfort that courtesy could provide, even if some of the rather material necessities of life were lacking.

We took dinner at the hotel. Seated opposite us at table were two farmers, one a handsome middle-aged man, and the other a man wizened and gray, with a weather-beaten face, and a kindly eye; seventy years old, I imagine, but still as active and as interested in life as a boy, as all Iowans, irrespective of foolish years, seem to be. One or two little courtesies of the table started an acquaintance, and naturally enough I was asked my business in the State.

"Oh, I am out here lecturing," I said.

"Well, we 're farmers," said the old man.

Now the Only Muse takes a great interest in farming. She raises herself most of the vegetables we consume at home, and one of my ambitions has always been to set her up as the presiding Deity over a real farm some day when the lure of the platform no longer operates to drag me off into distant scenes. She had taken a course of lectures on farming at Columbia University, and was enthusiastically full of the subject at the time. Wherefore it happened that when my vis-à-vis announced that he was a farmer it was the best kind of opening for the conversational powers of the Only Muse — which to say the least are generally adequate — and she made the most of it. She talked of apples, corn, cows, and bees. She dilated eloquently upon the value of persistent "cultivation," and as I sat listening admiringly to her evidently masterful handling of her varied subjects I suddenly became conscious of the old man's eye twinkling across the table at me, and then, as the Only Muse paused to catch her breath for further disquisition, he leaned forward, and with seemingly innocent curiosity asked:

"*Which one o' ye does the lecturin'?*"

I trust that the outburst of merriment that greeted his query conveyed to his mind with perfect clarity the fact that there are no professional jealousies in my household.

At any rate this, with the wonderfully witty response of a distinguished railway president to certain reflections I had made in an after-dinner speech on his road, appeals to me as one of the most delicately subtle bits of wit I have encountered anywhere in real life — which life on the road undoubtedly is.

That the reader may judge for himself if the railway president was wittier than the Iowa farmer or not, I will close this chapter with a short narration of that incident.

The gentleman in question was Daniel Willard, president of the Baltimore & Ohio, who on an occasion in New York listened courteously to some facetious observations I had to make on the subject of the wonders of the B. & O., and two days later heaped coals of fire upon my head by sending me by mail a pass over his railroad. I was of course delighted; but before using it decided to read carefully the "conditions and limitations named on the reverse side," under which it was is-

sued. I turned the treasure over and read the following:

> This pass will be accepted for transportation WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY CERTIFICATE of Company's Agent, attested by office-stamp, that the bearer has presented evidence of being HOPELESSLY INDIGENT, DESTITUTE, AND HOMELESS, or an INMATE OF A CHARITABLE OR ELEEMOSYNARY INSTITUTION, a SOLDIER or SAILOR about to enter either a NATIONAL HOME or "A HOUSE BOAT ON THE STYX," or otherwise qualified as entitled to free transportation under Federal or State Laws.

I do not remember whether or not I ever thanked Mr. Willard for this courtesy; but if I did not I do so now, and beg to assure him that I would not exchange that little document to-day for a controlling interest in his road. I am not much of a business man, but I have a keen sense of relative values.

XI

MINE HOST

Whoe'er has traveled life's dull round,
Where'er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.

SO wrote William Shenstone, a minor poet of England in those brilliant days that produced Addison, and Swift, and Richard Steele, and our own great philosopher and humorist Benjamin Franklin. I used formerly to sympathize deeply with the poet's sentiment, so charmingly expressed, and in a certain way I do so still; but in the last decade, involving so much wandering, and so many inns of varied degrees of excellence, I have found that my sympathy with Shenstone's thought has undergone considerable modification. I should indeed sigh to think that I had found my warmest welcome at an inn; but I should hesitate to indorse any sentiment that would seem to underestimate the value of the whole-souled, genial

character of Mine Host, as I have encountered him in all parts of the United States.

While I cannot truthfully say that I think we Americans have a genius for hotel management, such as our cousins of Switzerland, for instance, appear to have, I can at least say that I believe we have a natural aptitude for a peculiarly delightful kind of spontaneous hospitality, of which I have been for years the grateful beneficiary. If a hotel were a thing of the spirit solely, I should say that the hostelries of the United States, taking them by and large, approximate perfection; but unfortunately one cannot impart tenderness to a steak with cordial smiles, freshness to an egg with a twinkling eye, or the essential properties of coffee to a boiled bean with a pleasant word; and if in the South and Middle West it were possible to sweep a room clean with a welcoming wave of the hand, and to set a mobilized entomology in full retreat with the fervor of an advance in friendliness, I should not think so often, perhaps, upon the possible duties of local Boards of Health in respect to the American hotel situation.

I hasten to add, however, that this situation, hopeless as it at times appears to be, brings forci-

bly to my mind that ancient chestnut set forth in the sign in the Far Western church —

DON'T SHOOT THE ORGANIST:
HE IS DOING THE BEST HE CAN—

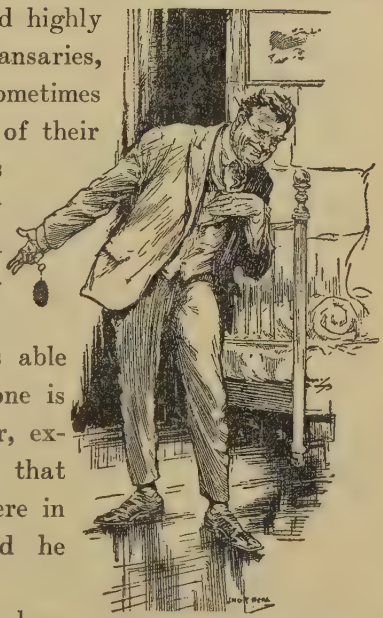
for I verily believe that in nine cases out of ten the landlords of the nation are in point of fact doing the " best they can," and in many instances in the face of heart-breaking discouragement. They are themselves quite aware of their deficiencies, as was once clearly established in the inscription I saw in front of an Oklahoma caravansary as I passed through on the Katy-Flyer, to the following effect:

THE SALT AND TOOTHPICKS SERVED AT THE
SAINT JAMES ARE AS GOOD AS THOSE
AT ANY HOTEL IN AMERICA

Our American communities, unfortunately, have not yet awakened to the economic fact that a good hotel is about as valuable an asset as a town can have. An enterprise that might very properly, and for the general good, be subsidized by the Board of Trade, or even by the town itself, is left to private initiative; usually with barren, if not bankrupting, results.

New England is slowly awakening to this need,

and within the last few years a number of fine hostelries have been established, with the backing of real civic interest, and under trained management; but very few of even the most progressive Western and Southern Communities seem as yet to have taken so vital a matter into consideration. They have good will and courtesy enough among them to run a thousand highly acceptable caravansaries, and I have sometimes wished that some of their individual qualities might in some way be engrafted upon our more sumptuous Eastern hotels, where one is able to get anything one is willing to pay for, except the feeling that somebody somewhere in the hotel is glad he came.



"If it were possible to sweep a room clean with a welcoming wave of the hand—"

I do not know how many thousand library

buildings our great Ironmaster has caused to be built in this country — and we who write books have cause to be grateful to him for having provided such rarely beautiful mausoleums for the final interment of our cherished productions — but I have often wished that his generous pursestrings had been loosened on behalf of hospitality, rather than exclusively for the perpetuation of current fiction and books of reference that nobody ever uses. Before the trusts are finally curbed I hope that one or two more swollen fortunes may be produced, and that the owners thereof may be inspired to carry the light of living into communities in need of something of the sort, by building hotels for them, in which clean rooms suitably aired, and good food properly cooked, may be provided for those who have to travel, and are so constituted that they cannot eat poetry, nor sleep comfortably between the sheets of the lamented William James's incursions into pragmatic philosophy, dry as they unquestionably are.

How next to impossible it is for our good landlords in certain sections of the land to conduct their business profitably was once brought to my attention by a little incident in a town not many

leagues from Atlanta, Georgia. I found myself seated one evening at table opposite a traveling man of most marvelous gastronomic fortitude. For his supper he ordered cereal and cream, two fried eggs "done on both sides," some bacon, "a little of that steak," German fried potatoes, some baked beans, a bit of kippered herring, milk toast, preserved peaches, hot biscuit, sponge cake, and a cup of coffee. After the commissariat had responded faithfully, and the table had been duly decorated with the serried ranks of "bird-bath" dishes containing the bulk of the enumerated edibles, a third party arrived, and an old friendship between himself and my vis-à-vis was renewed.

"Well, Tommy, old man, it 's ninety-seven moons since I saw you last! How 's things?" said the newcomer.

"Oh — pretty good," said my vis-à-vis wearily. "Business is good enough; but I *ain't feelin' very well myself.*"

"What 's the trouble — caught cold?" asked the newcomer.

"No," said the other. "I 'm just feelin' sort o' mean — *my stummick don't seem just right. I guess I been workin' too hard.*"

"You 'd ought to eat milk toast," said the new arrival.

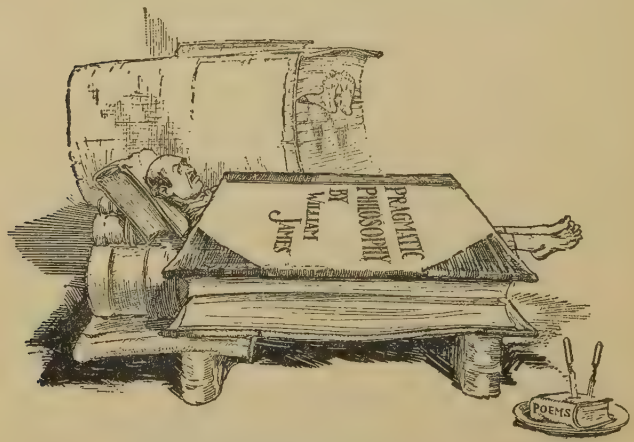
"Yes," said Tommy. "*I 've ordered some.*"

At this point the waitress came up for the newcomer's order.

"I 'm too tired to order, Jennie," said he. "Just you bring me the same as he has, and see that the buckwheats are hot."

"*Gee! Buckwheats!*" cried Tommy. "*I did n't know there was buckwheats — bring me a stack of 'em too, Jennie!*"

And all of this was on the American plan, at the



"Cannot sleep comfortably between the sheets of William James's pragmatic philosophy, dry as they are."

rate of two dollars for three meals and a night's lodging! I am afraid my friend of the uncertain digestive organs belonged to the same gastronomic school as a famous war correspondent I met at my club many years ago. He was an Englishman, and was delightfully enthusiastic about everything he had found in America except our hotels.

"And even they would n't be so bad," said he, "if it was n't for that beastly American plan upon which they 're run. Why, out in San Francisco I actually had to eat and eat and eat until I was positively ill, to get ahead of the game!"

Traveling Americans are inclined to criticize the hotels of foreign countries for their lack of bathroom facilities, and I recall an occasion in Rome some years ago when I found the act of taking a dip in the one bathroom the hotel provided almost as formal a function as a presentation at the Vatican, involving a series of escorts from my room to the dark little hole on an upper floor where the tub was kept, far greater in number than those involved in my progress from the American college to the papal presence.

Indeed, the only occasion I can recall when in a foreign country I was able to get a bath without

encountering all sorts of obstacles was also in Rome, four years ago, when I endeavored to order a bottle of mineral water in my choicest Italian, and got a bath instead, the whiskered male chambermaid of whom I ordered it having little familiarity with his own tongue as " she was spoke " by an American.

But precisely similar conditions exist in this country. An eminent singer in one of his famous poems lamented the difficulty of getting the Time, the Place, and the Girl together; but if he had ever gone on the Chautauqua circuit in this land I fear he would have written also of the well nigh impossible operation of getting the Time, the Place, and the Tub together; and I may add that I wish a law might be passed requiring hotels that do provide bathing facilities to supply also at least one towel that is visible to the naked eye.

The story of the man who asked an Indiana hotel clerk to " give " him " a room and a bath," to be greeted by the instant response, " *We 'll give you the room; but you 'll have to wash yourself,*" contains quite as much truth as humor. I had to forego my dip in a Southern hotel on one morning because " *the last feller that took a bath*

here run off with the key to the door," and then on the following morning when the bathroom door had been forced open I found the tub constructed of tiles, with a lush growth of morning glory vines sprouting up between them. When in an Ohio hotel several years ago, having insisted upon a room with a bath, I found the latter in a dark cubbyhole whose doors and windows had evidently not been opened for months. Atmospherically speaking, the Black Hole of Calcutta was a thing of sweetness and light compared to it. Nearly suffocated, I struggled with the frosted-glass window at one side of the cell for several minutes, and finally with a supreme effort got it up: only to find that it *opened on an inner corridor of the hotel.*

And be it recorded that the heating facilities are quite on a par with these. The heating apparatus of most hotels is either missing altogether, or terrifying in character. The latter sort is especially in evidence in the natural gas regions, where that useful commodity is used with an airy carelessness that inspires dreadful forebodings.

I shall never forget my first introduction to natural gas as a heating proposition. It was in an

historic edifice in Ohio, which I shall not name; for it has already been sufficiently advertised by its "loving friends." Suffice it to say that by some strange oversight of Nature it still stands. To get to my room, in the first place I was compelled to rise several flights in an elevator whose lift was as uncertain as its years, and then with the aid of a hallboy to thread an intricate maze of interlocking corridors alongside of which the Dedalian Labyrinth was simplicity itself. Arrived finally in the room assigned to me, I found it dark, damp, and cold.

"How about a little heat here, Son?" said I, appealing to the hallboy.

"Sure!" said he.

The boy faded into the gloom of the far end of the room, leaned over, and tugged away vigorously for a few moments on a screw in the baseboard, and then standing back about two feet he began to bombard the wall with lighted matches — the kind which light only on the seat of a bellboy's trousers. I shall not attempt to say how many of these he lit and threw at the wall before anything happened. It seemed to be an appalling number, and considering the manifest inflammability of the building,

and the height of my room from the ground, it made me very nervous.

"What the dickens are you doing?" said I.

But there was neither time nor need for his answer. One well projected match seemed to hit the particular bullseye he was aiming at. There came a boom and a flash, and in a second I saw a half-dozen sizable flames creeping upward from the floor to a point about breast high on the wall, where by some strange miracle the conflagration stopped.

"Nacheril gas!" said the boy, with a grin, as he departed.

It had been my intention to remain overnight in that city; but when I realized that that same process was probably going on in at least a dozen other apartments, above, beside, and below me, I suddenly decided to return to New York on the night train. I will take my chances on the future life; but while I live, breathe, and have my being upon this terrestrial orb I believe in getting fire risks down to their lowest reducible minimum by adopting a policy of complete avoidance.

Our clever newspaper humorists have made a good deal of capital out of the haughty hotel clerk

with the diamond stud; but I must confess that I have never yet encountered this individual in the wide swath of my wanderings. Save in one or two places, I have found on the contrary a genial solicitude for my welfare, wholly undecorated as to shirt-front — often indeed without the shirt-front itself — which has more than offset such shortcomings as were characteristic of the inns over whose desks they presided.

On one occasion in Indianapolis I encountered what seemed at first to be a heartless lack of appreciation and cordial recognition on my arrival; but it was more than compensated for in the end, and I should add was rather the result of a too high expectation on my own part than the fault of the man behind the register. I had long wished to visit Indianapolis, largely because of its national reputation as a literary center. A State that has produced so many authors of high distinction as have come out of Indiana, with her General Lew Wallace, her James Whitcomb Riley, Charles Major, Meredith Nicholson, George Ade, Booth Tarkington, and those two purveyors of wholesome fiction and good, clean humor, the McCutcheon brothers, is entitled to some of the lau-

reled interest of a literary Mecca, and I registered at the Claypool in my boldest hand, quietly and confidently expecting some immediate recognition, such as a not altogether unknown worker on the slopes of Parnassus might expect to receive on arriving at Olympus.

The room clerk whisked the register round and studied the inscription for a moment. "What 's that — Boggs?" he inquired.

"No," said I, my crest falling a bit, "Bangs — John Ken —"

"Oh," said he, bringing his hand down heavily on the bell. "Front, show this gentleman to number three hundred and nine."

He tossed a key to the bellboy, which the latter caught with the dexterity of a Buck Ewing, the prize catcher in the ball games of my young manhood, and holding my diminished head as high as I could I followed him to the elevator, devoutly wishing that Riley or Ade might happen in and fall upon my neck, and show that low-browed room clerk a thing or two he would n't forget in a hurry.

And then came a sort of *amende honorable*. Scarcely had I got settled in number three hundred and nine when a second bellboy arrived, bearing a

note addressed to "Mr. John Henry Banks," neatly typewritten, and reading as follows:

> Dear Sir.— If you wish a table for the display of your samples and a plug key for the protection of the same, please apply at the office.
>
> Respectfully, The Claypool.

It was a salutary experience, and in my subsequent visits to the Athens of America I have approached it in an appropriate spirit of humility and respect. And philosophically I have tried to comfort myself with the thought that after all it would not be very surprising if a scuttleful of coal arriving at Newcastle were to find its coming a matter of small importance to those good people who dig that useful commodity out of the bowels of the earth at the rate of ten carloads a minute. Why should a mere writer of books arriving at Indianapolis expect to create any special commotion, when it is a well known fact that you could not possibly heave a brick in any direction in that charming city without hitting an author?

I think that for sheer originality in his craft, as well as for his human interest, I must award the palm among innkeepers I have met to a vigorous old fellow who either ran, or was run by, a hotel I

once visited in South Dakota. He was known to most people as "Conk": not because of the rather hard shell one had to penetrate to get at him, but because it was the first syllable of his last name.

His hotel was a two-story brick structure, sadly in need of a Noachian Deluge for its preliminary renovation, and built upon the pleasing lines of an infant penitentiary. This illusion was faithfully carried out by the rooms within, which had many of the physical qualities of the cells of commerce. The hotel had a dining room; but Conk had given up serving meals therein, and had also as far as I could observe abandoned everything else in the way of service as well.

My Muse and I arrived several hours before dawn, and after wandering hand in hand for twenty or thirty minutes along invisible highways reached the edifice. We registered, and were ushered to a pigeonhole on the second tier by a large, yellow-haired youth, who was trying to keep awake and mop up the office floor simultaneously, succeeding only indifferently in both operations. The particular cell set apart for our accommodation was lit by a half-candlepower bulb with a pronounced flicker, which shed a dim, re-

ligious light upon a walled-in space about ten feet square. In this there was a double bed, a nondescript piece of furniture which suggested a collision between a washstand and a bureau, a rocking chair that refused to rock, and a cane-bottomed arrangement of perilous spindles that would n't do anything else. After I had disposed of our two suitcases and my typewriting machine the only solution of another difficulty that immediately arose was to leave our feet out in the hall.

As soon as I noted the rather limited character of our accommodations I repaired below, to see if there was not available something a trifle more roomy: to find only the satisfaction involved in the contemplation of the tow-headed six-footer lying asleep on a bench exchanging dreamy nothings with his mop, which he held hugged tight to his breast. With persistent effort I might have awakened the mop; but the tow-headed youth was too far gone into the land of dreams to be recalled by anything short of a universal cataclysm. I therefore crept sadly up the stairs to our cell, and we reclined on the double bed until dawn, at which time the merciful providence of the half-candlepower bulb was completely revealed unto us; for if we had been

able to see that bed in its dim light no power on earth, not all the mobilized armies of the world could have induced us to lie down upon it.

An hour later we breakfasted on ham and eggs at a stand-up all-night lunch counter which we located after much wandering, and then, returning to the hotel, Brother Conk in all his muscular majesty dawned upon the horizon of my life. I can best describe him by saying that whatever he might do in action, a camera fiend would have found in him a perfect model for a snapshot of the long-looked-for White Hope. He was huge and indescribably red. His name should have been Rufus, and the hand of Esau was a smoothly shaven thing alongside of the Conkian fist. He had a penetrating, yet rolling eye that would have subjugated a Kaiser with a single glance. He was scrutinizing his fingernails as we entered his presence, and in view of my supreme ambition to remain a hero always in the eyes of my Muse I saw her safely deposited in our hermetically sealed receiving vault above before venturing to address the gentleman. This done, I started in to pay my respects to Mine Host.

"I don't suppose you could let us have a larger

room," said I tentatively, my words coming with a husky falter.

"I dunno what room ya got," was the gruff response, one of the rolling eyes settling full upon both of mine.

"We 're in nun-number thirty-two," I ventured meekly.

"Well, thirty-three 's an inch and a half wider," said he, biting off a hang nail. "Ya can move inta that if ya wanta."

It hardly seemed worth while, and considering that in respect to matters other than its size, or lack of it, we already knew the worst as to thirty-two, we left thirty-three unvisited on the principle that

> — makes us rather bear those ills we have
> Than fly to others that we know not of.

There were enough wings loose in number thirty-two to enable us to fly anywhere on the face of the earth; but we decided not to avail ourselves of them.

"Never mind, my dear," said I. "Sufferance is the badge of all our tribe."

And the Only Muse merely laughed, and with feminine exaggeration comforted me with the as-

surance that "it might be worse." I suppose it might have been; though I don't know how. Anyhow I sat down on the rockless rocker, drew an overdraft on the bank of cheer, and proceeded to read aloud that fine story of Fiona Macleod's about the good old North Countryman who every morning walked out upon his breezy headland and "took off his hat to the beauty of the world."

Later in the day the chairman of the lecture committee called to pay his respects, and in the course of our conversation I told him of my experience with Conk.

"I congratulate you most heartily," said he, laughing. "You came off rather better than an exchange professor from Germany who came out here last year to give a course of lectures at our agricultural college. He asked Conk in his pleasant German way for more spacious quarters, and Conk's answer was, '*Sure I can give ya more space.*' And taking the professor's suitcase in one hand, and the professor in the other, he rushed them both to the front door, threw the suitcase out into the street, and, pushing the professor gently out after it, remarked, '*There — I guess there's room enough for ya out there.*'"

Whether the chairman was a mind reader or not I do not know; but I do know that in response to my telepathic calls for help he turned to the Only Muse and suggested that in view of certain possibilities which might incapacitate me from filling my engagement at the lecture hall that night we had much better move over to his house, where we would find a warm welcome.

"That's fine!" said I, rising with alacrity. "Just you take her over with you now, and I'll see Conk, and pay my bill, and come over as soon as I can with our luggage."

The plan was promptly carried out, and after seeing the Only Muse safely on her way to other quarters I went to number thirty-two, gathered up our traps, and with trepidation in my soul approached the landlord. This time I found him sitting in the office, before the window, staring Nature out of countenance.

"Well, Mr. Landlord," I said, as affably as I knew how, "I — I've come to — to settle up. It seems we were expected to stay with Dr. and Mrs. Soandso. We — er — we didn't know it when we arrived — and I — I'm sorry to leave you; but — er — but of course —"

"*Thank God!*" the landlord returned explosively, rising and seizing my hand in a viselike grip that even to remember two years later causes me anguish. "That 's the first good news I 've had to-day. I been running this blankety blank blank joint for seven years now, and it 's cost me over thirty thousand dollars already, and every time I see a blinkety blank blank boarder come in through that front door it makes me so dashed sick that I feel like nailin' the blankety blank door up so tight old Beelzybub himself 'd have to come down through the chimbley to get inside!"

It was at this point that Conk and I parted company at the beginning of what I am inclined to think might have ripened into a lifelong friendship. *I had got his point of view!* Strange as his conception of hospitality seemed superficially to be, there was reason in him, and I began to perceive that he had some mighty good points. Frankness was one of them, and gratitude, and one of the incidents of his career as narrated to me later by one of his neighbors was convincing proof that, in sporting parlance, the old fellow was a good loser.

It seems that a certain traveling man of great

nerve force stopped overnight some years ago with Conk, probably occupying number thirty-two. It was a fearfully hot night, and the room became unbearably stuffy. For a long time the suffering guest strove to open the window, but without results. Prayer, condemnation, muscular force, all alike were powerless to move it. Finally in desperation the unhappy visitor threw on his dressing robe, and stalked down to the office to make complaint.

"It 's hotter than Tophet in that room of mine," he protested, "and I 've been monkeying with that dodgasted window of yours for the last hour, and the dinged thing won't give an inch!"

"Well, if ya can't move it, why in Dothan dontcha kick it out?" retorted Conk coldly.

"All right, I will," said the guest, returning to the furnace above.

And he did. Glass, frame, and sash were kicked with all the power of an angry man into a mass of wreckage never again to be redeemed.

"Well," said the guest the following morning, as he started to leave for the station, "what 's the tax? What do I owe you?"

"*Not a blamed cent!*" gruffed Conk. "You 're

the first son of a sea cook that 's ever had the nerve to call my bluff, and *by Henry you don't pay a nickel into my till except over my dead body!* "

If I have seemed in any wise severe in my treatment of Conk in this tribute to his memory, I am sorry. The material facts could hardly be glossed over; but as for the man himself I am truly glad to have met him. I would n't have missed him for a farm. He was not much of a Chesterfield; but he had his own ways, and they gave me a thrill. The joyous, almost grateful courtesy with which he put me out of his front door was a thing to remember, and I in turn am everlastingly grateful to him for letting me out on the ground floor instead of seizing me by the left leg and dragging me up through the skylight, and throwing me off the roof. He could have done it easily, and I am sure it was only the intrinsic, if considerably latent, nobility of his soul that restrained the impulse to do so that I am confident he felt.

XII

PERILS OF THE PLATFORM

"YOURS must be an extra hazardous occupation," said a chance acquaintance on a little trip through Ohio last year. "Do you carry any insurance?"

"Yes," said I. "I have an excellent accident insurance policy, and it is a great comfort. Sometimes on dark nights when I am suddenly awakened by some catastrophic quivering of my berth, as if a young earthquake had come aboard, and realize that the train has probably left the track, and is traveling ahead at a mile-a-minute clip over the rocky bed of some mountain stream, it is a real pleasure to me to foot up the sum total of the affluence that will be mine if we fail to strike a switch somewhere that will get us back on the main line again."

"Affluence is good," said he; "but it won't be yours — not if you break your neck."

"Oh, I never think of that," said I. "I think only of the possibility of injuries, and from that point of view the accident insurance policy is a joy forever. It makes you think so well of yourself, and as you lie off in your berth figuring on two legs and a couple of arms at five thousand dollars apiece, twenty toes and fingers at two hundred and fifty a digit, with your neck valued at twenty-five thousand dollars, you begin to feel that a man is n't such a worthless creature after all. I suppose even my nose is worth something."

"Great Scott!" he ejaculated. "Do toes and fingers come as high as that?"

"They do," said I. "I 've carried a policy assuring me a market for them at that rate for the last five years, and if I lose them in a railway smash-up, in a taxicab, in a trolley, or in a public elevator somewhere, the quotation doubles. Under certain contingencies my fingers and toes have a market value of ten thousand dollars."

"Heavens!" he cried. "*Have you ever had any luck?*"

From his point of view I presume I have not had any "luck"; but I am content, satisfied, and even grateful that so far the exigencies of travel have

not required me to collect anything on my policy, or compelled me to sacrifice any of my digital collateral even at what seem to be par or premium prices.

But my friend was not altogether wrong in regarding the occupation of an itinerant lyceumite as a hazardous one. If one were to conjure up a picture of the gods of evil shooting darts at human targets, one might think that, a moving object being harder to hit than one that is definitely fixed, the former would prove a better risk than the latter; but it is one of the paradoxes of life that this is not the case, unless of course the sniping fates are better sharpshooters than professional artillerists.

The possibilities of accident to one who is constantly moving from pillar to post on American railways, many of them starved to death in the name of Progress, and unable to maintain an equipment that is even moderately safe; on steamboat lines many of whose vessels are little more than resin-soaked tinderboxes, over-crowded with pipe and cigarette smokers, and speeding through fog-bound waters at night as though the Evil One himself were just astern in pursuit of the Captain;

sleeping in hotels constructed of Georgia pine, on mattresses stuffed with excelsior, with matches that, like flies, will light on anything in sight, strewn about on every side,— well, to commute this sentence, the possibilities of accident to such a one are of such a sort that "age cannot wither nor custom stale their infinite variety."

And as for the lecture halls, one now and then encounters a place where it seems as though it were a vain-glorious tempting of fate to enter it. I recall one marvelous hall in one of the most cultured sections of New England, in a town not more than seventy-five miles from Boston, the home of one of America's most famous schools, and the capital of a State that has produced men of worldwide eminence, which in any Court of Commonsense would have been indicted as a menace to the public welfare. It was reached by a climb of two flights of stairs, the first scarcely wide enough for two people to walk up abreast, and the second rising from the end of a dimly lighted corridor up six steps to a landing whence ran on each side two other sections of four or five steps each to a second landing, with still a third turn and another climb before the auditorium floor was

reached; and all this in an ordinary brick building, erected long before fireproof construction was even thought of.

My lecture in this architectural device of Beelzebub was delivered before an audience of four hundred people, just one week after the terrible disaster at Boyerstown, Pennsylvania, in which I know not how many lives were lost in a fire started by the explosion of a cinematograph machine. As I stepped upon the stage I inquired of my escort if there were any fire escapes on the building, and was informed that a huge iron door at the rear of the stage opened upon one. I was moderately relieved until I tried to open the iron door, only to find it locked — *and the janitor had left the key at home!* I may add that if my memory serves me correctly — and it does — this ingeniously designed atrocity was pleasantly and appropriately known as Phenix Hall. *Absit omen!*

In the main, however, the lecture halls of America are rather fine affairs. In the State of New York and on the other side of the Mississippi River I have found splendid auditoriums, acoustically perfect, well ventilated, and as nearly safe as human ingenuity can make them. The high

schools of New York and Massachusetts, and the flourishing educational institutions of the West, have set a pace which other communities would do well to follow: not so much for the sake of the itinerant platformist as for the "safety, honor, and welfare" of their own sons and daughters. In Houston, Texas, where there is a municipally owned free lecture and music course on Sunday afternoons, beginning in October and running through to May, is one of the finest auditoriums I have ever seen anywhere. It seats in comfort and safety an audience of eight thousand, and neither New York, Boston, Philadelphia, nor even Chicago, has anything comparable to it.

I have indeed had luck according to my own conception of it, on trains traveled on, and in respect to trains missed as well. I have been in two railway smash-ups, in the first of which the car behind mine was overturned and reduced to kindling in the twinkling of an eye, and miraculously without serious injury to any one; and in the other the engine directly in front of the car in which I was sitting, having endeavored to jump a frozen switch, succeeded only in landing upon its own back, leaving my car teetering to and fro for

a moment as if undecided whether to roll down an embankment, or to remain poised on its off-side wheels like a ballet girl balanced upon one tangoing toe. If the gentleman who sat beside me on that occasion had shifted his chewing gum to the other side, I think we should have gone plunging down that embankment into the river; but fortunately he was too paralyzed with fear even to do that, and we remained fixed, safe as ever was the intrepid Blondin when he essayed to walk across Niagara Falls on his slack wire.

As for the trains missed, it was only an over-prolonged discussion of the mysteries of golf between myself and a past-master of putting at Haverhill, Massachusetts, which caused me to miss by ten seconds a section of the Portland Express to New York that five hours later landed in a ditch somewhere in Connecticut.

In respect to perils by water there are the steamboat perils, and those more insidious dangers that come from too free indulgence in the only kind of beverage the wise platformist dares adopt as a steady tipple. These latter perils I have tried to reduce to a minimum by having a billion and a half typhus germs mobilized within to patrol

my system, so that any skulking bacilli seeking to spread revolutionary ideas in my midst, and gain-

"If he had shifted his chewing gum to the other side, we should have plunged into the river."

ing admittance thereto through my taste for ice water, will be seized and duly throttled ere they have time to lay the foundation for an effective propaganda.

But there is no inoculation against the perils of steamboats; although I have been in imminent danger only once in this way, and in its ultimate results even that was far more amusing than terrifying. I was on my way to Boston by the Fall River boat when the incident occurred. The night was foggy, and I retired early. The faithful craft kept steadily on her way, feeling her path through the dark waters of the sound. I slept only fitfully until midnight, when weary Nature at last asserted herself, and I fell into a profound slumber. At four in the morning, however, I was awakened rudely by a fierce shriek of the whistle, a seemingly quick reversal of the engines, a very decided shock as of an impact with some heavy body, followed by a grinding sound, and much shouting.

I sprang from my berth, and glancing out of the window could see nothing but grimly gray fog. It was the work of a moment to jump into my shoes and bathrobe, and go speeding out into the main saloon.

"Any danger, Porter?" I inquired of a wide-awake gentleman of color, who was leaning over the stair-railing.

"*Not unless yo' goes asho', Kuhnnel,*" he replied with a grin. "*Dis is Newport.*"

But there are perils other than these which must be taken into account in reckoning up the hazards of the profession — or perhaps in view of the eternity of the chase it were better called a pursuit. They include exposure to almost every kind of catastrophe mentioned in the Litany, from battle, murder, and sudden death, through hunger and thirst, to the tapering point of mere necessity and tribulation.

I have nearly starved with teeming granaries on every side of me. Once in a delightful mid-New York community which I have since revisited and come to hold in affection, I found myself after a long, tedious, and foodless journey at a hotel where the table was frankly impossible. I arrived late, and out of an ample bill of fare there was nothing left but a few scraps of preserved fish, and not very well preserved at that. If fish could be personified, this particular bit of piscatorial cussedness might have passed as the Rip Van Winkle of the Sea, so long had it evidently been since it left its home in the depths. The merest glance at it filled the eye with visions of serried ranks of ptomaines, armed

cap-à-pie for trouble. It waved the red flag of digestive anarchy from the end of every bone and fin, and fortunately for me the very pungency of its aroma took care of my hunger for the moment. One sniff appeased my appetite for any kind of food.

Later, when the chairman of the committee called and invited me to take a drive with him about the town, even though I had had nothing to eat for nearly twelve hours, I accepted. At the end of our drive we stopped at the chairman's home, a delightfully comfortable, newly built house, which he had designed himself and of which he was justly proud. As we entered his dining room a natural association of ideas caused my appetite to return with renewed vigor, and I thought I saw a chance for at least one good meal that day.

"By Jove, Doctor!" said I, "what a pretty room this is!" And then I added, with all the pathos I could put into my voice, "You don't know what a joy it is to get a glimpse now and then of a real home dining room after eating day after day in some of these fearful country hotels. I don't want to seem unduly critical, but really I

got the worst dinner at the Blithers House to-day that I 've ever had." And I stood expectant.

"Well," he said reflectively, "*you 'll get a worse supper!*"

And lo, it was so.

A similarly distressing moment one morning out in Montana once brought me a more satisfactory tribute. My train was hours late, and no preparations had been made by the usually considerate management of the Northern Pacific Railroad for the refreshment of the inner man. There was neither diner nor buffet on the train, and as the morning wore on toward noon I became famished to the extent of positive pain and general giddiness. To my supreme relief, however, along about half-past eleven o'clock the train drew into the little station of Livingston, where connections are made by travelers to the Yellowstone. As we drew slowly in the welcome sign of "LUNCH ROOM" greeted my vision; but the train did not stop until we had passed the sign by at least a hundred yards. Finally when we came to a standstill I rushed to the rear platform of the train, and was about to jump off when the conductor intervened.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"For food," said I. "I 'm nearly dead for a cup of coffee."

"We 're not going to stop any time," said he, with a glance at his watch. "We 're seven hours late as it is."

"Oh, come now, Conductor!" said I. "Five minutes more is n't going to hurt anybody —"

"All right," said he, "go ahead. Only when you hear the whistle blow don't lose a minute, hungry or no hungry."

With that understanding I sped to the lunch counter, and in a few moments had a roll and a steaming cup of coffee before me; but, alas for all human expectations! the coffee was so fearfully hot nothing but a salamander could have hoped to drink it with safety, and I had hardly taken one scalding sip of it when the whistle blew sharply. There was but one thing to do, and I did it. I poured the coffee into my saucer and drained as much as I could of it from that, thrust the roll into my pocket, and darted after the train, which had already begun to move slowly, conscious all the while of the soft thud of pattering feet, like those of the white rabbit in "Alice in Wonder-

land," behind me. I caught the train, seizing the rear platform rail with one hand, and when swinging myself on board was projected almost flat on my face by another passenger who suddenly developed like an infant battering ram at the rear. He was a little man, and his breath came in appropriate pants. Both completely winded, we gazed into each other's eyes.

"Bub-beg pardon," he gasped. "I dud-did n't mean to bub-bump into you. Very grateful to you — yuh — you saved my life!"

"Saved your life?" said I. "How so?"

"Why," said he, "I was nearly gone for want of my coffee, and the stuff was so infernally hot I could n't drink it, and then when I saw you pouring yours out into your saucer, I says to myself, '*Well, if a swell-lookin' guy like that kin do that, I kin,— an' b'gosh, I did!*"

A not infrequent source of terror to the platform speaker, if not a real peril, is the small boy one encounters en route, singly and alone or in groups. I am glad to say that I have always delighted in him, and so far, despite the possibilities, none of my contacts with him has resulted disastrously; but, while nobody ever need mark him

"FRAGILE," it is none the less true that he should be handled with care, and kept right side up if possible, for the sake of the general comfort.

One of these youngsters once gave me a supreme example of intrinsic honesty which I shall never forget. I met him on the evening of my lecture in the town of Everett, Massachusetts. I had somehow got the notion that Everett was farther afield from Boston than it really is, and starting early I arrived at the high school hall a full hour before the advertised time. The building was dark, and every door was locked; so that for some thirty or forty minutes I was compelled to pace the sidewalk in front of it, awaiting the arrival of somebody who could let me in. After several turns up and down the street I was accosted by a bright-faced little urchin who held a ticket for my lecture in his hand.

"Want to buy a ticket for to-night's lecture, mister?" said he.

"No, son," said I. "I 've heard this lecture several times already, and I would n't go through it again for seven dollars."

"Gee!" he ejaculated. "*If it 's as bad as that, I guess I 'd better tear this up.*"

And he destroyed the ticket on which he had doubtless expected to realize much soda-water money before my very eyes, and went whistling along upon his honest little way.

Perhaps this little lad does not come properly under the head of Hazards; but in one of the larger cities of Arkansas I once came upon a group of boys who did, and they kept me in a state of trepidation for a goodly part of the evening. It happened that simultaneously with my arrival in town there arrived also a snowstorm that for that section of the country was a heavy one. Heavy or light, it brought with it enough snow to provide these forty-odd youngsters with the kind of occupation that all healthy-minded youngsters find to their taste — that of snow-balling passersby. When my motor arrived at the lecture hall the boys were on hand, and for two or three minutes the car was the object of a fierce fusillade of icy missiles that nearly put the chauffeur out of commission. The committee hustled me into the hall with no more damage than one rather slushy splosh of snow perilously close to my neck.

"It 's a shame, Mr. Bangs," said the chairman, "and I apologize. These boys are n't a bad lot;

but they are irrepressible. I 'd advise you to go slow with them to-night. They 've broken up two lectures already."

"Gracious!" said I. "Do they attend the lectures?"

"Yes," said the chairman. "By arrangement with the school authorities they have the first two rows reserved for them free."

And sure enough when I walked out upon the platform there they were, two solid rows of them, eying me like hungry birds of prey ready to pounce upon a particularly luscious morsel. I should have fled if flight had been possible; but it was not, and I looked forward to an hour and a half of trial. But as the chairman was introducing me an idea popped into my head which I am glad to say saved the day — or rather the night. Instead of my usual opening I addressed a few words to the boys.

"It is an awful shame, my young friends," said I, "that the requirements of this lecture course and the necessities of my own engagements compel you and me to waste such a delightful evening as this indoors. I feel just as badly as you do about it; for while what few hairs I have are gray, I give

you my word that I 'd rather go into a good redhot snowball fight with you than listen to the finest lecture that was ever delivered. If I did n't have to go on to Memphis to-night, I 'd ask the committee and the audience to postpone this lecture until the snow melts, so that I could show you what a corking shot I am at any old beaver hat, moving or fixed, that ever crowned a mortal head."

The effect was instantaneous. A wave of enthusiasm swept over the lads, and the only interference I had from them during my talk was a somewhat too-ready inclination on their part to help me along with laughter and applause at points where tears and silence would have been more appropriate. Moreover, when at the close of my lecture I started with some reluctance to leave the hall, instead of the volley of arctic ammunition that I had expected, I found those youngsters lined up twenty on a side between the door and my motor with their hats off, forming a little alley of honor for me to tread, giving me three rousing cheers as I departed.

From which somewhat trying experience I deduce that there is a good deal more latent courtesy

in Young America than certain despairing critics of modern manners would have us believe. It may be that the reason why we do not find it oftener is that we do not ourselves give it the opportunity to express itself.

I have spoken of our exposure to "battle, murder, and sudden death," and to some it may have seemed an exaggeration to claim anything of the sort as a platform peril; and yet there was one occasion upon which I was so uncomfortably tangent to such conditions that they seemed all too real. It was in one of our far western States. Scheduled to lecture there at eight P.M., my train did not reach the town until nine-forty-five. I had telegraphed news of my delay ahead, and my audience with rare courtesy had voted to remain at the hall until I arrived.

I dressed on the train, and on descending from it was whisked to the opera house in a prehistoric hack, which shed one of its wheels en route, spilling the committee and myself into the road, but without damage; while my Only Muse went on to the hotel, a two-story affair, where she secured accommodations for the night. Later, on the conclusion of my talk, on my arrival at the hotel, I

"Laughter where tears would have been more appropriate."

found the Muse sitting up in bed, pallid as a ghost, with a revolver at her side.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" I demanded, more than startled at the sight.

She hardly needed to answer; for almost as I spoke from a saloon located immediately underneath our room came the sharp crack of pistols.

Somebody below there was engaged in the pleasing occupation of "shooting up" the place. Not having seen the plans and specifications of the hotel, I did not know how thick the floor was, or what were the prospects for a sudden eruption of bullets through the carpet. It was not any safer to venture out either; for there was no telling how far the trouble might spread. So I jumped into bed and trusted to a combination of Providence, floor, and hair mattress to hold me immune. The disturbance did not last long, however, and shortly after midnight all was quiet, and sleep came.

Two hours later we were awakened by a snarling quarrel going on directly under our window. Two men were applying epithets of an uncomplimentary nature to each other, when suddenly one of them passed the bounds of even occidental toleration. He called the other a name that no right-minded man could be expected to stand, and we heard three sharp cracks of a revolver zipping out in the air. We sprang from the bed and rushed to the window, and there lying flat on his back, on a light fall of snow, in the glare of an electric lamp, was a man, with a gradually widening red spot staining the white of the road on

which he lay. There was no sign of an assailant anywhere; but in a few moments, in absolute, almost ghostly silence, black figures appeared from seemingly everywhere, and bent over the fallen victim. We could hear low whisperings, and then suddenly one of the black figures detached himself from the group, and ran off down the street, returning shortly with a covered carriage. Into this the murdered man was placed, the carriage was driven off, the snow muffling the feet of the horses, the black figures vanished as silently as they had come, and all that was left of the tragedy was the red spot in the snow.

We had heard tales of witnesses to similar disturbances being detained for months under surveillance, practically prisoners of the law, pending the trial of the guilty, and were in no mind to suffer a similar experience ourselves. Wherefore when morning came we rose with the first glimmer of dawn, packed our suitcases, and, asking no questions of anybody, departed for other scenes on the earliest milk train we could catch; which happened, fortunately, to be going in the right direction for us.

Personally I have a horror of the Zeppelin and

its powers to make things uncomfortable from its aërial thoroughfares; but as between it and the perils of being shot up from below by playful spirits in a frontier saloon I think I shall choose the Zeppelin if the choice must be made. At any rate, if either emergency should ever again enter into my life, I trust I shall have a bomb-proof roof overhead, or an armor-plated hair mattress underneath me; for I have no taste for a last end in which a coroner will be called upon to decide whether the victim of the affair was a mortal being, or a lifeless combination of porous plaster and human sieve.

XIII

EMBARRASSING MOMENTS

I SHALL never forget the expression of serene immunity from care on the face of one of my editorial chiefs when some years ago I told him that I was very much embarrassed by certain arrangements he himself had made over my head. They were such arrangements as to make my position frankly impossible.

"You have embarrassed me more than I care to say," said I.

"Embarrassment is a sign of weakness," he replied calmly. "Don't ever be embarrassed."

"But what can I do?" said I. "You have made these arrangements, and —"

"Well, if I were you," said he, smiling, and putting considerable emphasis on the *you*, "rather than admit that anything under heaven embarrassed me I 'd tell *me* to go to the devil with my arrangements."

I took him at his word. We both laughed, and the immediate awkwardness vanished. While I cannot truthfully say that telling him to "go to" was a wholly satisfactory ultimate solution of all our difficulties, I have as a matter of policy adopted that attitude toward troublesome things ever since, to the material advantage at least of my own peace of mind. I have found the philosophy involved a workable one, and more than helpful to me in the pursuit of my platform labors, especially that part of it involving the "laugh."

It certainly rescued me from a deal of unhappiness over a wasted date a year or so ago in Michigan, for which I was in no sense to blame, and which, had the various parties been inclined to quarrel over misfortune, might have resulted in much unpleasantness.

Following a Wednesday night engagement in mid-Ohio was a Thursday night in a more or less remote section of the Wolverine State. To reach the Thursday night scene of action I was required to rise at five o'clock in the morning and travel with one or two awkward changes of trains to Fort Wayne, going thence to Kalamazoo, and from there by a way train to the point in question. It

was a long, tedious drive of a day, and when I reached Kalamazoo I unburdened myself vigorously to the Only Muse to the effect that if anybody, anywhere, would offer me a job as third assistant manager of a tolerably stationary peanut stand at two dollars a week, payable in deferred promises, I should consider the offer a most tempting one.

My comfort was not at all enhanced by my discovery on reaching Kalamazoo that I had completely misread the timetables, and that instead of arriving at our destination at five in the afternoon, leaving me plenty of time for rest, refreshment, and change of clothes, the only possible train, even if it ran on time, could not get me through to the haven of my desires until five minutes before eight, with the lecture scheduled to begin at eight-fifteen. So I rested, refreshed, and dressed at Kalamazoo, and perforce traveled over the last stage of that wearisome journey in full evening dress, slowly but surely accumulating en route a sufficient supply of soot, cinders, grit, and other appurtenances of travel on a soft-coal, one-horse railroad, to make me appear like a masterpiece of spatterwork when I arrived at the farther end.

By some odd mischance, never as yet satisfactorily accounted for, the train got through on time. The Only Muse and I hastily boarded an omnibus, and were whisked through the impenetrable depths of a dark night to the hotel, whence, after seeing her properly bestowed, I hastened to the Auditorium where the lecture was to be held. To my surprise when I got there I found the building wholly dark. There was not a sign of life anywhere about it. I banged, whacked, and thundered on the door like an invading artillery corps; but with no response of any sort. But a glance up the street a moment later relieved the pressure of my woe; for there my vision was cheered by a brilliantly lighted church.

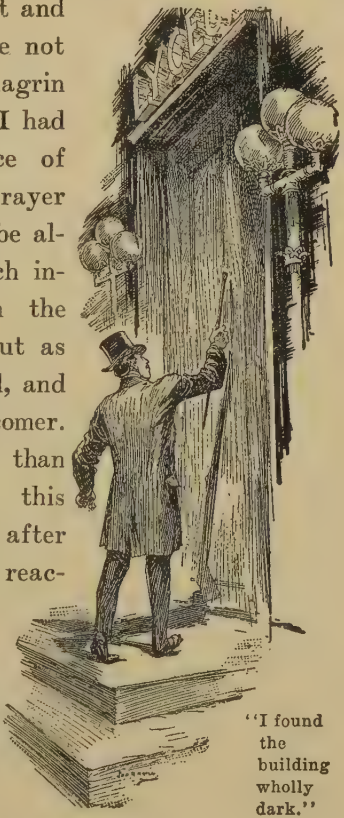
"Of course," I thought, "the Auditorium is too small to accommodate the audience, and they 've changed over to the church."

I glanced at my watch, and discovered that I had two minutes to spare. A goodly sprint brought me panting to the front door of the edifice, and with some unnecessary noise, perhaps due wholly to the impetuosity of my approach, I burst in upon the assembled multitude — to find, alas!

that the very sizable audience gathered there with their heads bowed, and listening to an eloquent appeal for blessings desired by a gentleman wearing a long frock coat and a white necktie, were not for me. To my chagrin I soon learned that I had come within an ace of *breaking up* a prayer meeting — if I may be allowed the use of such incongruous terms in the phrase. I backed out as gracefully as I could, and collided with a late comer.

"Is there more than one Auditorium in this town?" I whispered, after apologizing for my reactionary behavior.

"Oh, yes," he replied politely, "there is the Auditorium, and the High School Auditorium."



"I found the building wholly dark."

"Well, would you mind telling me where they are?" I queried.

"That is the High School Auditorium up there," he said, pointing to the Egyptian darkness I had just left. "The other is three squares down, where you see all those electric lights."

Whether I thanked the gentleman or not I do not know. I hope I did; but in the hurry of my departure I fear I seemed discourteous. Another speedy dash, which left me completely winded, brought me to the other Auditorium, and there in the full glare of an electric spotlight, assisted in its quest of publicity by a hoarse-tongued barker with a megaphone, I was confronted by a highly colored lithograph, showing a very pink Mabel, Queen of the Movies, standing before a very blue American soldier tied to a tree, shielding him from the bullets of a line of very green Mexicans, under the command of a very red villain, holding a very mauve sword in his very yellow hand, and bidding them to "Fire!" If I was expected to take any part in the thrilling episode that appeared to be going on inside, there was nothing in the chromatic advertising outside to indicate the fact; though I confess I was becoming painfully conscious of cer-

tain strong resemblances between my very breathless self and that very blue American trooper tied to the tree.

"Excuse me," said I, addressing the barker, "but is there to be a lecture here to-night?"

"Not so 's anybody 'd notice it," said he. "These is the movies."

"Well — tell me — is there a lecture course of any kind in this town that you know of?" I asked.

"Sure!" said he. "Miss So-and-So down at the library is runnin' a lecture stunt of some kind this year. You 'll find the library on Main Street, opposite the hotel."

Again, late as it was, the skies cleared, and I moved on to the library, completing the circuit of vast numbers of blocks to a point almost opposite the spot I had started from fifteen lifelong minutes before. I arrived in a state of active perspiration and suspended respiration that did not seem to promise much in the way of a successful delivery of my lecture that night. I hoped the Library Auditorium would not prove to be a large one; for in my disorganized condition I did not feel capable of projecting my voice even into the shallows, to say nothing of the sometimes unfathom-

able depths of endless tiers of seats. And my hope was realized; in fact it was more than realized, for there was n't any Library Auditorium at all.

The citizens of that town had a library that was devoted rather to good literature than to architectural splendor. Their books were housed in an ordinary shop, or store. It was deep, narrow, and bookishly cozy, and at the far end of it, seated at a generously large table, engaged in knitting, was a charming lady who glanced up from her needles as I approached.

"Pardon my intrusion, madam," I panted, "but can you tell me where I can find Miss So-and-So?"

"I am Miss So-and-So," she replied graciously.

"Well," said I, "I am Mr. Bangs."

Her knitting fell to the floor. "Why — Mr. Bangs!" she replied, with a gasp almost equal to my own. "I am very glad indeed to see you; but what are you doing here?"

"I — I 've come to lecture," I said weakly, almost pleadingly.

"To lecture?" she echoed. "*Why, your lecture is not to be until a week from to-night!*"

"Then I am afraid we shall have to get my as-

tral body to work," said I; "for a week from to-night I shall be at Hiawatha, Kansas. How do you propose to have the lecture delivered — by long distance telephone, or parcels post?"

We gazed into each other's eyes for a moment, and then — we both laughed. It seemed the only thing to do.

Gallantry forbids my saying which of us had made the mistake under the terms of the written contract. Suffice it to say that two months later I returned to that good little town, and was received like a conquering hero by an audience that in its cordiality more than compensated me for the distressing effects of an "unlectured lecture."

What promised to be a more serious complication occurred about a month later in Florida, where in pursuance of instructions from my Southern managers I arrived at Daytona on a Monday, to open the flourishing Chautauqua Course, which has become a permanent feature of life at that attractive Southern resort. The seriousness of the situation grew out of the quality of the genius and the nature of the popularity of the other individual involved, who was no less a personage than the Hon. William Jennings Bryan. Any minor

star in the platform firmament who comes into collision with the planetary splendor of this Monarch of Modern Loquacity has about as much chance of escaping unscathed as a tallow-dip would have in a passage at arms with the sun itself.

There is no escaping the fact that Mr. Bryan is the idol of the Chautauqua Circuit, and it is equally true that every bit of the success he has achieved therein he has earned many times over. I am not, never have been, and see no possibility of my ever becoming, a devotee of Mr. Bryan's political fortunes; but as a platform speaker he is far and away the most brilliant and likable personality in the public eye to-day. He is an expert in playing upon the emotions of an audience, large or small — preferably large — as ever was Dudley Buck in the manipulation of the keys and stops of an organ, and he can at will strike chords in the human heart as searchingly appealing as any produced by an Elman or a Kreisler on the violin, or a Paderewski at the piano.

The keynotes of his platform work are a seeming sincerity and a magnetic humanness that are irresistible, and no individual who has ever listened to him in matters outside of political controversy,

however reluctant to admit his greatness, has failed to fall beneath the winning spell of man, matter, and method. He is an interesting personality, and has a greater number of points of contact with the general run of humanity than any other public speaker of to-day. It is a stimulating thing to know that in this line of human endeavor he has got his reward in the assured position he holds in a movement at which it is the fashion in some uninformed and cynical quarters to sneer, but which in point of fact has had a supremely awakening effect upon the American people, and for which we are all of us the better off.

"All of which," as a friend of mine once put it after I had expressed myself in similar terms concerning Mr. Bryan, "is some tribute for a narrow-minded, hide-bound, bigoted, old standpat, reactionary, antediluvian Republican to pay to a hated rival!"

I was frankly appalled on arriving at Daytona to find the town placarded from end to end with posters announcing Mr. Bryan's appearance there that evening — my evening, as I had supposed it to be. I did not know exactly what to do. I

knew perfectly well what would happen to me if it came to a hand-to-hand contest for possession of the stage. Physically, with Mr. Bryan and myself left to decide the matter for ourselves, after the fashion of a pair of bantam white hopes, I felt that I might have a fairly good chance to win out; for I am not altogether without brawn, and in the matter of handling a pair of boxing gloves am probably quite as expert as the late Secretary of State; but nobody outside of Matteawan would be so blind to commonsense as to expect an audience anywhere either to stand neutral or to indulge in a policy of "watchful waiting" with such a contest going on on the platform.

My first impulse in the circumstances was to get out of town as quickly and as quietly as I could, and forget that there was such a place as Daytona on the map; but a careful scrutiny of my letter of instructions reassured me. The date, according to the supreme managers at Atlanta, was clearly mine, and I decided at least to go down with colors flying. I have never run from my own lithographs, and I saw no reason why I should flee from Mr. Bryan's. I got in touch with the local committee as soon as possible, and soon had at least

the solace of companionship in my misery. They were as upset about it as I was.

"But, Mr. Bangs," protested the chairman, almost with tears in his eyes — his voice was full of them —"you aren't due here until to-morrow night."

"I don't see how that can be," I replied unfeelingly. "You know perfectly well that I am not twins, and only twins can appear in two places at once. I am to lecture at Miami to-morrow night."

I handed the gentleman my letter of instructions, confirming my statement. It was all down in black and white.

"It 's a perfectly terrible situation," said the chairman, tears even springing from his brow, "and I 'm blest if I know what to do!"

"There is only one of three things to be done," said I. "The first is to let me sit in the audience to-night and listen to Mr. Bryan, collecting my fee on the ground that I have earned it by holding my tongue — which is some job for a man primed with unspoken words. The second is to let Mr. Bryan and myself go out on the platform and indulge in a lecture Marathon, he at one side of the stage, I at the other, talking simultaneously, the one that

gets through first to get the gate money. The third and best is for you to telegraph Mr. Bryan and find out direct from him what his understanding is as to the date."

The first or the last of the propositions would have suited me perfectly; for I should have been delighted to listen to Mr. Bryan whether I was paid for it or not — and most assuredly had Mr. Bryan himself laid claim to the date no power on this earth could have lured me into a dispute over its possession. I am too proud of this life to risk its uncertain tenure for the brief glory of an hour on a preëmpted platform.

I am glad to say that before dusk the complication was cleared off; for, the third alternative having been accepted by the committee, Mr. Bryan was caught on the wire, and replied instantly to the effect that he was to lecture that night on some such subject as "The Curse of Wealth" at Palm Beach, where many sufferers from that particular blight are annually gathered together in large numbers. The skies immediately cleared, and I went out that night before a packed house, the unwitting beneficiary of widespread advertising on Mr. Bryan's behalf, and enjoyed myself very

much; although as I sped along I could "spot" here and there in the audience individuals who, having come to hear Mr. Bryan, like Rachel weeping for her children, "refused to be comforted."

My only lasting regret was that my contract did not call for the payment to me of fifty per cent. of the boxoffice receipts. I have no doubt there were people there that night who thought, and possibly still think, that I stole that audience. And perhaps I did; but I was no more responsible for the theft than was poor little Oliver Twist, who found himself at unexpected places at unlooked for hours through the efforts of those "higher up." I may add too in all sincerity that if Mr. Bryan himself feels, or felt, in any way aggrieved over what he might call my "unearned increment" in listeners, I will gladly exchange fees with him. I will unhesitatingly, at his request, and by return mail, send him my check for the full amount received by me on that somewhat nervous occasion if he will send me a postoffice order for the amount received by him the evening after.

Embarrassments of a less poignant character frequently arise in the matter of unexpected calls for service, for which the public generally assumes

the platform speaker to be necessarily always prepared, but for which as a matter of fact no amount of preparation could adequately fit any man built on the old-fashioned plan in respect to his nervous organization. One of these affairs came into my experience a decade ago, when, crossing the Atlantic Ocean on that high-rolling ocean greyhound, the *Lucania*, I was drafted by an overzealous committee of arrangements to preside over one of those impromptu entertainments got up on shipboard for the benefit of the widows and orphans of those who go down into the sea in ships. To these more than worthy enterprises gratitude for benefits received has always made me a willing contributor; but to participate in them has ever been a trial. I would rather lecture before the inmates of a deaf and dumb asylum with a sore thumb.

The company aboard a transatlantic liner is always, to say the least, "mixed" in the matter of nationality; and, while one might be willing to "make a stab" at being witty before a gathering all English, all French, all German, or Pan-American, woe be unto him who vaingloriously attacks the risibles of a multitude made up of all these widely varying racial elements! Their standards

of humor are as widely divergent as are their several racial strains, and one might as well try to sit on four stools at once with perfect composure as expect to find the "Chair" under such conditions comfortable. One has to acquiesce in such demands, however, or be set down as disagreeable, and when the committee approached me in the matter they received a much readier yes than I really wished to give them.

The night came, and I found myself at the head table in the dining saloon working for dear life to keep the thing going. There was a pretty slim array of talent, and from one end of the program to the other there was nobody to hang a really good joke on, even if I had had one to hang. A chairman can always be facetious at the expense of distinguished people like Chauncey M. Depew, Henry James, or Mr. Caruso, and "get away with it"; but the obscure amateur cannot be handled with brutal impunity. I think I may say truthfully that no man ever worked harder at the pumps of a sinking ship than I did that night. And to make matters worse there was a heavy rolling sea on, and, while I never suffer from seasickness, the combination of motion and nerves made

me uncomfortably conscious of an insurgent midst as I forged hopelessly ahead.

Finally, however, there came a rift in the cloud of my despair. A pleasant little cockney ballad singer who was coming over to America for a season in vaudeville volunteered to sing a ballad. It was well sung, and most pathetic. It depicted in dramatic fashion the delirium of an old British veteran, who, as the hour of death approached him, was fighting over again in fancy the battles of his youth. The refrain of the ballad was *Bring me the old Martini, and I shall die in peace!* — referring of course to the rifle that for a period of years up to 1890 had been the official weapon of Tommy Atkins. I made the most of so obvious a lead, and before introducing the next number on the program thanked the singer for his dramatic rendering of so fine a story.

" But, my friends," said I, " that ballad saddens me in more respects than one. I have long believed in international brotherhood. In common with my friend Conan Doyle and others who have advocated the hands stretched across the sea, I have been in sympathetic accord with the idea of universal brotherhood; but now and then certain

little things crop up that, insignificant in themselves, show us none the less how radically far apart we really are. This splendid old British warrior calling for his Martini is a case in point, and I am sure my own compatriots here to-night at any rate will realize the vast gulfs of separation that exist between the Britons and ourselves when I ask them what they would bring to a dying American soldier, delirious or otherwise, if he were to call for a Martini."

The point took with the Americans; but the others, charming Frenchmen, delightful Germans, cultivated Englishmen, stared at me in stolid silence, and one or two of them shook their heads as if bewildered. It was a hard situation, and I slammed the rest of the evening through without further attempts at playfulness, retiring to the seclusion that my cabin granted an hour later, resolved never again to serve as presiding elder at a vaudeville show either on land or sea.

I felt almost as solemnly embarrassed as I did one evening in Pennsylvania, later, when my lecture was opened with prayer and I heard a good clergyman begging the Lord to "show His mercy upon the audience gathered here," to "protect

them from all suffering, and in His infinite wisdom, if it were His will, to enable the speaker of the evening to rise to his opportunity."

But there was an after result of that Martini jest which more than made up for the depression that followed its failure to strike home. I write of it, however, with some diffidence; for I am convinced that some reader somewhere will observe that the incident is only another variation of Senator Depew's famous tale of the Englishman who wanted to know what really was the matter with the mince pie. As a matter of fact it is the twin brother of that famous anecdote; but, while I am perfectly willing to think the Depew story really happened, I know that mine did, and I therefore record it.

The morning following the impromptu concert I was pacing the deck of the steamer when one of the more distinguished passengers aboard, an English army officer, who occupied at that time, and still holds, an important post in British military circles, stopped me.

"Mr. Bangs," he said, holding out his hand, "I want to thank you for a charming evening last night, and to express my admiration for the de-

lightful way in which you carried off your difficult honors. It was really most interesting."

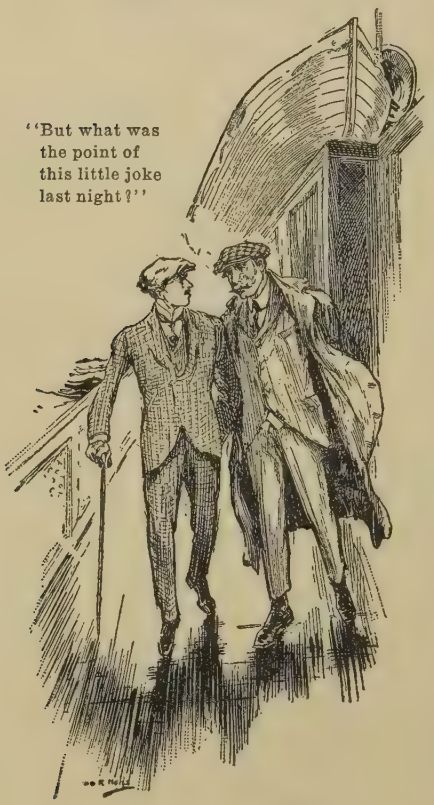
"Thank you, General," said I. "That is very nice to hear. I thought it fell rather flat."

"Not at all, not at all," he rejoined; "though, to speak quite frankly, there was one of your jests that I — I — I did n't really get. What humor you have, sir, I think I appreciate. During a period of convalescence in the Transvaal somebody sent me a copy of your 'House Boat on the Styx,' and I — I — I found it very amusing; but this joke last night — after the little chap had sung that ballad — about the dying veteran you know — it quite escaped me. Er — *what would they bring an American soldier who called for a Martini?*"

"Well, General," said I, restraining an impulse to be amused, "I might explain, and explain and explain the point to you, giving you a chart in full detail, exploiting the theory of the thing as fully as possible, without satisfactory results. It is a case where an object lesson will demonstrate in a minute what no amount of abstract argument could convey in a year. If you will come with me into the smoking room, I 'll show you exactly what

nine out of ten people in America would give to a soldier crying aloud for a Martini."

We repaired accordingly to the smoking room, and in response to my order the steward shortly placed two misty Martini cocktails before us,



"But what was the point of this little joke last night?"

"There you are, General," said I, smiling, "that's what!"

He gazed at the Martinis a moment, and then he fixed his handsome eyes on me. There was a merry twinkle in them, and after he

had swallowed the object lesson he leaned over with a broad smile and spoke.

"I am very much afraid, Mr. Bangs," said he, "that that idea you Americans have that we British are sometimes a trifle sluggish in our perception of the subtler points of an American jest, bristling as they often do with latent significance, is not altogether without justification. In order to show you how completely, how fully, I appreciate the excellence of your witticism I would suggest that *we have two more.*"

I draw no conclusions of an invidious nature from this little episode; for I recall with pain, and some contrition, an American audience in a prohibition section of one of our Eastern States before whom I had the hardihood to tell that story on a hot summer night three years ago, only one of whose six hundred members saw the point, and he did n't dare laugh for fear that by doing so he might risk his reputation for sobriety — or so he informed me for my consolation later in the evening as he and I zig-zagged together down an ice-covered mountain-road to the railway station in a rattling motor car driven by a chauffeur who had apparently confounded his own stomach with the gasoline tank.

XIV

"SLINGS AND ARROWS"

ONE'S democracy receives a pretty severe test on the road, and I am indeed sorry for the man who is always so solicitous for his own dignity that the free and easy habits of the American of Today affront him. The lecture platform is no place for what Doctor Johnson's friend Richard Savage would doubtless in these days have characterized as "the tenth transmitter of a foolish pride."

A people like ours, made up of a hundred million sovereigns, and actuated for the most part, in their social intercourse at least, by a spirit of fraternity, mixed with a very decided inclination to be facetious, forms a somewhat bristling environment for the supersensitively self-centered. If such a one contemplates the invasion of the lyceum territory, as a friend and brother let me advise him to spend at least a year in some social settlement

where he may be inoculated with sundry useful social germs, as a preventive of much misery ahead. He must get used to much familiarity of a sudden sort, and realize fully that our American world, while it respects ability, and withholds from it no atom of its due appreciation, is in no particular a respecter of mere persons.

In respect to " having to be shown " we are by a large majority " from Missouri," and it will never do for the lyceumite to try to hedge himself about with any fences of false dignity. The palings of those fences may be sharp, and connected with barbed wire; but the American citizens of the hour walk through them, or vault them, as easily as if they were not there. And it is all very harmless too; for no man's real dignity has ever yet suffered from any assaults other than his own.

I recall an incident of my travels in the Dakotas some years ago that brought this situation home to me very vividly. I was on my way to a county seat in one of those vast twin commonwealths on a rather sluggish way train, and found among my fellow travelers three very live human beings who had apparently just met after a long separation. One of them was a rather stout little man, with a

fresh, boyish face; another was a tall and spare ferret-eyed individual who might have posed as an acceptable model for a picture of Sherlock Holmes; and the third was a well built young giant, a veritable blond Samson, full of the boisterous spirits of young manhood.

The three sat across the aisle from me, and inasmuch as Nature had not seen fit to supply their vocal organs with soft pedals, or pianissimo stops, I became an unwitting, though not unwilling, listener to their conversation. It was amusing, clean, and bristling with good-fellowship, though not wholly Chesterfieldian in character. Finally the Sherlock Holmes man, turning to the stout little chap, who was sitting next to the car window, observed:

"Well, old man, you 're lookin' a heap better than ya did the last time I saw ya."

"Yes," said the stout little man, "I 'm feeling better. I 've been on a diet for the past six months."

And here the stalwart young blond Samson playfully interposed. "Well, it was about time, ya big, fat stuff!" he said. "Ya had a stummick on ya big enough for sixteen men." Whereupon

he proceeded to jam the little man's derby hat down over his eyes.

Ordinarily this would be regarded as a rather commonplace, unenlightened conversation; but its application to my point came the following morning, when, having several hours to spare before departing for other scenes, I went into the county courthouse to watch the litigation in progress there. It was a scene full of interest, and the proceedings were conducted on a plane of dignity quite in keeping with the highest traditions of the bench, everything going on decently and in order. But the interesting and possibly amazing thing about it to me was the sight that greeted my eyes in the person of the Sherlock Holmes man of the day before, conducting an eloquent argument before the stout little man of the train, who was no less a person than — *the Presiding Justice!* And the young giant who had called him a big, fat stuff, and jammed his hat down over his eyes, was the *court stenographer!*

I had the pleasure of lunching with all three of them later in the day, and a finer lot of true-blue American citizens I have not met anywhere else, before or since.

If one has any purely physical peculiarity of an obvious nature, he must get reconciled to having it used as a hook for his discomfiture, or his delectation, according as his own attitude toward the slings and arrows of life causes him to take them. In my own case perhaps the most conspicuous personal idiosyncrasy I present physically to the eye of the casual beholder is an almost abnormal lack of hirsute adornment; always a favorite point of attack by facetiously inclined chairmen, by whom I have been eloquently likened to the "imperishable Alps" for that I lacked "vegetation" on my "summit," to a "heliograph on the Hills of Letters," and by one I was called "the legitimate successor of the lamented Bill Nye, the Original Billiard Ball on the Pool Tables of Modern Humor."

Most of my delectable misadventures in respect to this deficiency have naturally occurred in the barber shops of the nation, and it has been surprising to me, as an interested student of American humor, to note how full of variety are the spontaneous outbursts of the Knights of the Razor everywhere upon that seemingly barren topic.

One barber in Wisconsin, to whom I facetiously

complained that he should not charge me full price for a haircut when there was so little to cut, came back immediately with, " Ah, but you see I had to work overtime to find it! "

Another in Boston, after shaving me, inquired, " Now how do you want your hair brushed? "

" Brush it back like that young man's in the next chair," said I, pointing to a Harvard student with a perfect mop of hair, resembling a huge yellow chrysanthemum, which the neighboring artist was brushing laboriously back from the youthful forehead.

" Humph! " said my friend. " I 'll try; but, take it from me, *it 'll take a blistering long time to brush your hair back!* "

But the readiest bit of repartee that I recall in respect to this shortcoming was that of a Philadelphia barber two years ago, who was trying to make me presentable for my audience that night in the Witherspoon Hall University extension course, where I was to deliver a series of lectures on American humorists.

" Now," said he, running his hand over the back of my head after he had attended to my other needs, " how do you want your hair fixed? "

"In silence, and without humor," said I. "I am approaching my fiftieth year in this world, and since thirty I have been as you see me now. In the course of those twenty intervening years I have heard about every joke on the subject of baldness that the human mind has been able to conceive at least fifty thousand times."

"I guess that's right," said he. "You are pretty bald, ain't you?"

"I am, and I am not at all ashamed of it," I returned. "My baldness has been honestly acquired. I have not lost my hair in dissipation, or by foolish speculation, but entirely through generosity of spirit. *I have given my hair to my children.*"

"Gee!" he ejaculated with fervor. "*You must have the divvle of a large family!*"

I made use of that incident in my lecture that night as a convincing demonstration that whatever had happened to the humor of the professional humorist, as a natural gift of the American people that branch of humor known as repartee was still running strong.

Intentionally or otherwise, I think the best joke ever perpetrated upon me in respect to my lack of

capillary attraction occurred at Bellingham, in the State of Washington, up near the Vancouver line, back in 1906, when I made my first trip to the Pacific Coast. I was the victim that season of a particularly distressing window card, got up in a great hurry from a most unsatisfactory photograph, and designed to arouse interest in my coming. It greeted me with grinning pertinacity everywhere I looked.

I am skeptic on the subject of window cards anyhow. I could never convince myself that printed cuts are really effective instruments of publicity, and I vow with all the fervor of which I am capable that they are a nuisance and a trial to what the public call "the talent." I also know that in at least one instance they bade fair to work adversely to my interests, as was shown in a letter received by me many years ago from an unknown correspondent in Kansas City, who addressed me thus:

My Dear Sir,—I inclose herewith a copy of a so-called photograph of yourself published in this morning's Kansas City "Star," and I want to know if you really look like that. The reason I write to inquire is that yesterday was my little boy's birthday, and his grandmother presented him with a copy of one of your books. I haven't had time to read the book myself; but I have taken it away from Wil-

lie, and shall keep it pending your reply, *for if you do look like this, you are no fit person to write for children.*

I must confess that a single glance at the muddy reproduction of a long discarded photograph convinced me that my naïve correspondent was not a whit more careful of his parental responsibilities than the situation justified. I might readily have passed, if that photograph were accurate, for a professional gambler, or a highly probable future candidate for the Rogues' Gallery.

But, whether the platform worker is helped or retarded by this indiscriminate plastering of public places with his counterfeit presentment, committees seem to think it necessary, and we therefore provide them with the most pulchritudinous pictorial composition that Art, unrestrained by Nature, can produce.

But the one I used in 1906 was a most unflattering affair, and I grew heartily sick of it as my tour progressed. At Bellingham it was oppressively omnipresent. It seemed as if I had erupted all over the place. It greeted me in the railway station when I descended from the train. Two of them hung in the hotel office when I entered, and as I walked up the street after luncheon I overheard

sundry unregenerate youths remark, "There he goes!" and "That 's him!" and "Oh, look who 's here!" derisively, until I could almost have wrung every juvenile neck in town. On one corner I found it in a laundry window, labeled, "John Kendrick Bangs at the Normal School Tonight," and placed immediately beneath this was a brown paper placard inscribed in great, red-chalk letters with the words, "HELP WANTED." Farther up the street I found it in a millinery shop window, pinned beneath a composite creation of Bellingham and Paris which was not particularly becoming to my pictorial style.

But the climax was reached when I found it in a drug-store window, where the window dresser had placed it over another placard, the advertisement of a well known patent remedy. My picture covered the whole of the patent medicine placard except its essential advertising line at the bottom, and as I stood there staring at myself through that plate glass window my grinning countenance stared back at me unflinchingly, and underneath it was the legend,

HIRSUTERINE DID THIS AND WE CAN PROVE IT.

In gratitude to the perpetrator of that horrific joke let me say that I have used the incident as the opening anecdote in my Salubrity lecture ever since, and I really believe it has had as much to do with making me *persona grata* to my audiences as any other feature of my discourse.

A tolerably effective arrow that struck fairly on the bullseye of over-self-appreciation came to me out of the dark of a well intended compliment in a prominent New Jersey city several years ago. I had lectured before a fairly appreciative audience, seated conspicuously in the midst of which was a young man

"My grinning countenance stared back at me unflinchingly."

whom I recognized as the very courteous and affable room clerk of the hotel at which I was stopping. He and his friends formed a nucleus of appreciation which more than compensated me for the barbed glances of one or two unwilling auditors dragged thither reluctantly, probably from more alluring indulgences in bridge or draw poker at their clubs. Both my heart and head expanded under the influence of their continuous enthusiasm, and my emotions of satisfaction were intensified when on my walk back to the hotel I heard the friendly room clerk, stalking just ahead of me, exclaiming enthusiastically:

"Did n't I tell you he 'd be good? By George! I read one of his books once, and I 've wanted to see him ever since."

It was all very nice, and I hugged the pleasant intimations of his remark to my breast all through my dreams that night. But the morning brought disillusionment, and a mighty poignant shaft entered into the soul of me. After eating my breakfast I stepped to the hotel desk to pay my bill, and was there beamingly greeted by the room clerk.

"Well, Mr. Bangs," said he, with out-stretched

hand, " that was a fine talk you gave us last night, and I enjoyed every minute of it. But I knew it would be good."

" Thank you," said I, my chest expanding a bit.

" I 've only read one of your books," he went on; " but it gave me a lead on you. I don't want to flatter you, but — well, *it was the funniest book I ever read*, and I 've been wondering if you would write your autograph in it for me."

" Surely," said I, not only willing to please him, but quite anxious to see which of my books it was that had filled him with such enthusiasm.

" I have it here," said he, taking the volume out of a drawer.

" Good! " said I. " Let 's have it."

He handed it to me, and I glanced at it. *It was a copy of Jerome K. Jerome's " Three Men in a Boat, not to Mention the Dog! "*

" No flattery at all," said I, my growing conceit falling back to par. " I 'm glad you like it."

And then for the first and only time in my life I committed forgery. I took the book to a writing table near at hand, and inscribed the flyleaf with " Appreciatively yours, Jerome K. Jerome." And

as I left the hotel the last sight that greeted my eyes was my kindly deputy assistant host studying that inscription with a look of extreme bewilderment on his screwed-up countenance.

Apropos of this incident it is rather curious how frequently my name and that of Jerome K. Jerome have been confounded. I have always considered it a compliment, and I sincerely hope Jerome himself will not mind it. I suppose the identity of our initials J. K. is responsible for it, and possibly the fact also that Jerome's "Three Men in a Boat" and my own "House-Boat on the Styx" were published at about the same time. One of the most amusing incidents based upon this confusion of identity occurred in California last spring. I was spending Easter Sunday at that remarkable hostelry, the Mission Inn at Riverside, feeling that in some way in despite of my deserts I had got into heaven, and quite convinced that I could stand an eternity of it if the particular atmosphere of that wonderful Sunday were typical of life there. The inspiring Easter sunrise service on Mount Rubidaux was over, and I was resting comfortably in the office when a young woman paused at my side, and said,

"You will excuse me for speaking to you, sir, but your face bothers me."

"I am very sorry, Madame," said I, "but it has bothered me too for over fifty years."

"Oh, I don't mean that way," she answered quickly. "I mean that I can't place it."

"Well," said I, trying to smile, "you really don't have to. It is already located."

"But I don't know where I have seen it before," she pleaded.

"Nor do I," said I, "but I think I can reassure you on that point. Knowing myself as I do I can assure you that it must have been in a perfectly respectable place."

"I wish you would stop fooling," she retorted, a trifle impatiently. "I want to know who you are. You see I 'm of a rather nervous temperament, and when I see a familiar face and cannot remember the name of the individual who — er — who goes with it, sometimes it keeps me awake all night."

"It would be too bad to have that happen," said I, "and inasmuch as I am not at all ashamed of my name I shall be delighted to tell you what it is. It is Bangs — John Kendrick Bangs."

" Oh — I know," she cried, her perplexity fading away, " You are the man who wrote ' Three Men in a Boat.' "

And the dear lady seemed to be so pleased over the honor of meeting so distinguished an author that I really had n't the heart to undeceive her.

I have always thought of my young friend the room-clerk far more kindly than of another New Jersey host whose airy nonchalance in what was to me a moment of some seriousness struck me as being almost arctic in its frigid non-acceptance of responsibility for untoward conditions. I had put up over-night in his jerry-built hostelry, and all had gone well until breakfast time. I was seated at table enjoying my frugal repast, when without warning from anybody I found myself the sudden recipient of a heavy blow on the top of my head, and upon emerging from the rather dazed psychological condition in which the blow left me discovered that I was covered from head to foot with plaster, and that my poor but honest poached egg had become a scrambled one, mixed with the impalpable dust of a shattered bit of molding.

A glance heavenward showed whence my trouble had come. A section of the ceiling about four

feet square had come loose, and had landed upon me. I could think of no better way to voice my protest against such an intolerable intrusion upon my rights of privacy at mealtimes than by giving the hotel manager an object lesson then and there of what was going on under his roof. So I rose from the table and walked directly to the office just as I was.

"Great Scott!" said my host, as I loomed up before him like a glorified ash heap. "What 's happened to you?"

"A part of your condemned old ceiling has fallen on me, that 's what!" I sputtered somewhat wrathfully.

"Oh, that 's it, eh?" he replied, with a smiling grace which I hardly appreciated at the time. "Well, we don't do that for everybody, Mr. Bangs," he added; "*but seeing it 's you we won't make any extra charge.*"

I thanked him for his consideration. "I 'd like to buy this hotel," I added.

"Well, it 's for sale," said he. "Like to run it yourself?"

"No," said I. "I thought it might be some fun to buy a Panama fan and blow it down."

With which we parted forever. I have returned to the gentleman's bailiwick several times since; but never again have I entered the portals of that hostelry, for fear that by the careless dropping of my tooth-brush or a cake of soap I might cause the complete collapse of the structure, with the possible destruction of innocent lives; though if I were assured that in falling it would land only on that landlord's head I think I would willingly go out of my way to hire an aëroplane some night and drop a pebble upon its roof from a height of three or four feet. This is not

"I was the sudden recipient of a blow on top of my head."

so vindictive as it seems, either; for it would not hurt that landlord over-severely. You could drop a much heavier weight than that hotel upon any bit of solid ivory within reach without hurting the ivory unduly.

A less sordid, and indeed wholly inspiring, incident along similar lines occurred three years ago at Georgetown, Texas, when on a terrific night in February, which I shall never forget, I stood for a few minutes face to face with what might have proved an appalling tragedy. As I look back upon the incident now it seems to me to have been at once the most thrilling, and at the same time the most stimulating, moment of my life.

I had arrived at Georgetown early in the afternoon, and simultaneously with my coming — and, as some of my critics may intimate, possibly because of it — there arrived also one of those dreaded windstorms known in that section of the world as a norther. Perhaps the Texans are so used to these outbursts of Nature that they take them as all in the day's work; but to myself, unused to anything more boreally disturbing than an occasional nor'easter on the Maine Coast, it was

extremely disturbing. I did not dare walk on any of the sidewalks, fearing that the loudly rattling signboards of commerce might be precipitated upon me. One of the best liked literary friends of my younger days had passed from intellectual brilliance of a most promising sort into permanent mental darkness through the falling upon his head of a swinging sign in New York, and I had come to regard such possibilities with dread.

The Muse and I consequently spent the afternoon indoors in a quivering but substantial and well kept hotel, whose courteous landladies neither the Muse nor I will ever fail to remember with affectionate esteem. As I rode in an omnibus to the lecture hall that night, I rejoiced in the heaviness of the vehicle, which otherwise must have been overturned by the heavy blasts to which it was subjected.

When I reached the college I found the auditorium on the third floor of the main building in almost total darkness, the only light coming from an oil lamp standing on a piano at one end of the stage. The wind had put the electric lighting apparatus temporarily out of commission; but students were at work upon it, and I was assured

that all would be well if I would defer my lecture for a little while. To this of course I consented; for, however pleasing it may be to talk to one person in the dark, there is no pleasure in addressing a multitude of people into whose eyes one is unable to look.

After fifteen minutes of waiting the electric lights suddenly gleamed forth, and I was gratified to see before me an audience of substantial size, made up for the most part of students, with a fair proportion of the townspeople scattered about here and there. The college was a coeducational institution, and the boys and girls were in fair measure paired off in congenial fashion.

With the restoration of the light the president of the college stepped to the front of the platform and presented me to the audience, after which I rose and approached the footlights to begin. But never a word was I permitted to speak; for as I started in the howling wind outside seemed to redouble in its fury and intensity. There came a sudden loud grinding and ripping sound, and a huge part of the roof was lifted bodily upward, and then dropped back with a crash. One heavy beam fell squarely in one of the aisles without

injury to any one, though two feet off on either side it would have killed the occupants of the aisle seats, and from all parts of the great room big chunks of plaster and lathing fell in upon the audience.

There was present every element of a tragedy of fearful proportions; but from that assembled multitude of young people came not even a scream, and on every side I saw stalwart young Texans of To-day and To-morrow rise up from their seats, and *lean over the girls sitting crouched in the chairs beside them, taking all the weight and woe of that falling ceiling upon their own manly shoulders!* It was a magnificent exhibition of readiness of resource, self-control, and unselfish chivalry. Almost instantly with the first shock the president of the college, with a calmness at which I still marvel, rose from the chair behind me and confronted the gathering.

"Now, my young friends," said he, speaking with amazing rapidity, each word enunciated as incisively as though spoken with lips of chilled steel, "remember — this is one of the emergencies you are supposed to be trained to meet. There is no telling how serious this situation is; but let us

have no panic. Rise and walk out quietly, and without too much haste."

The youngsters rose and marched out of the hall in a fashion that would have delighted the soul of a martinet among drill masters, down three flights of stairs to the campus, silently, and without the slightest outward manifestation of the fear that must have been in the hearts of every one of them.

There had appeared in one of America's best magazines only a few months previously a scathing arraignment of the young American of To-day, in which the girls were indicted as being frivolous, lacking in self-control, and full of selfishness, and the American boy was held up to public scorn as knowing naught of respect for authority, and wholly deficient in the quality of chivalry for which the youth of other times had been noted. I wished then and I wish now that the good lady who spoke so witheringly on that subject could have witnessed what I looked upon that night in Texas. I think she would have modified her utterance at least, if indeed she would not have changed her point of view completely. She would have made her assertions less sweeping, I am convinced; for she would have learned from that episode, as I have learned

from my contact with the youth of this land, not only in Texas but elsewhere, that save for a superficial element, fortunately not very large, the American youth of to-day, boy or girl, is in the main a strong-fibered, self-controlled, unselfish, chivalrous product which would be a credit to any nation, anywhere, at any time, past, present, or future.

In conclusion let me say that when I returned to Georgetown the following season to deliver my undelivered lecture I was introduced to practically the same audience as "the man who brought down the house without even opening his mouth."

Which shows that not only are youthful chivalry and self-control not dead in Texas, but that American humor likewise is in flourishing condition in that truly imperial State of our Union.

XV

EMERGENCIES

QUICK thinking on and off the platform is quite essential to the happiness of the man on the road. The sniping fates are always after him, in small ways as well as in large, and he must keep himself in a state of constant readiness either to dodge their flying shafts, or with some suddenly devised shield of resourcefulness to render himself arrow proof.

Sometimes the successful warding off of a flying missile sped from the bow of some malign goddess of mischance becomes the making of the man, as in a case once reported to me by a gentleman in Montana when after my lecture at Billings he and I were laughing over the complete capture of my audience by a big gray tomcat that had entered the lists against me. This privileged creature had leaped into the chair immediately behind me, and begun massaging his face in true feline fashion, to the intense delight of a most amiable gathering.

I suppose that if I had known what was going on behind me, I should have tried to rise to the occasion on the spur of the moment; but not knowing it I read on, in blissful unconsciousness of the fact that a series of living pictures was flashing across the vision of my audience directly to the rear. The only sensation experienced at the time by my innocent self was one of supreme pleasure and satisfaction that my audience had at last awakened to the beauty of my discourse, and was manifesting in most gratifying fashion its appreciation of even the subtlest of my points. When at the close of the reading the real truth was revealed to me I merely smiled, and never for a moment let on that until the chairman spoke of the animal I had not suspected its presence.

"We admired your composure, Mr. Bangs," said the chairman. "A good many men would have been rattled by such an intrusion as that; but you went right on without a break. In fact, if you don't mind my saying so, you were better after the cat than you were before he came."

"Oh, well," said I, "we have to get used to that sort of thing. The trained lecturer really ought

to be able to go on even if a young earthquake were to fall upon him. Do you always try your lecturers on a cat?" I added.

"Well, I had n't thought of it that way," he laughed; "but as a matter of fact we most generally do. That cat belongs to our janitor, and he 's pretty sure to turn up somewhere during the evening. One year we had a man out here giving some recitations, and I tell you old Tom helped him out considerably. He was rolling along through some funny speech or other, when the cat jumped upon the platform, washed his face two or three times, scratched his ear for a minute, and then with his eye fixed on the audience he walked straight over the electric footlights to the other side of the stage and disappeared. The audience roared and the recitationist stopped, gazed with mock indignation at the people for a second or two, and then addressing me he said, '*Mr. Chairman, I understood that this was to be a monologue — not a catalogue.*' Of course it brought down the house, and ever since then that man has been about the most popular number our lecture course has ever had."

As a standard of emergency repartee I am in-

clined to think this incident sets the high-water mark.

The intrusion of four-footed creatures on the line of vision at lectures is unfortunately not rare. Lecturers have no terrors for mice and rats, and just as every hall is provided with a janitor, or janitrix, so is every caretaker provided with a cat, as a preventive of rodential troubles. I have got so used to their presence, however, that I no longer bother about them. As long as they leave me alone, and hold their tongues, I am content to have them disport themselves as they please, in the public eye or out of it. But a dog is another proposition altogether.

Personally I like dogs better than I like cats; but for platform purposes I prefer the feline to the canine intrusion. One knows pretty well in advance what a cat will do; but a dog is a most uncertain quantity. The cat's attentions are likely to be general, or, if not, centered wholly upon his or her own toilet — washing her face, manicuring her ears, pursuing her tail — but the dog too frequently takes a direct personal interest in the chief performer of the occasion. And while I should never think of attributing critical faculties to any

kind of dog, they sometimes have a way of expressing what might pass for opinions, worthy or unworthy, concerning the work in hand, in no uncertain tones.

As evidence of this I recall an afternoon devoted not long since to the reading of one of Browning's exceedingly difficult masterpieces, in the presence of a number of ladies and one highly intelligent Irish terrier. The poem was Browning's "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," full of beauty and of inspired thought, but not easy reading, and requiring unusual concentration of mind to get out the full measure of its charm. My small audience was most appreciative, and as I approached the climacteric I was feeling tolerably well satisfied with the results, when this keenly critical terrier suddenly rose from his resting place, stationed himself deliberately before me, stretched himself until it almost seemed that one could hear his bones crack, and sent forth upon the mystery-laden atmosphere about as expressive a whining yawn as one might expect from the Seven Sleepers themselves, all rolled into one, and too early awakened from their slumbers — and there the "climacteric" rests to this day.

I never finished the reading, and what had been an hour of highly concentrated mysticism reached its sixtieth second in a wild roar of hilarious relief.

A less comfortable moment involving a canine intruder occurred at Binghamton, New York, back in 1898, when I suffered the double intrusion of a secret society initiation going on overhead, which may or may not have been made interesting to the initiates by the presence of the proverbial goat, and the sudden appearance upon the stage of a huge bulldog of terrifying aspect.

Above me was every indication, in sound at least, of a wild creature "abounding and abutting" upon the whole length of the superimposed floor, accompanied by muffled yells, presumably from the despairing throats of brothers elect. But this was as nothing in its effect upon my peace of mind to the sudden development of that bulldog in our midst. He came in through the open door of the hall, and walked deliberately down the center aisle, and thence up the steps to the platform whereon I was engaged in the pleasing occupation of "Reading from My Own Works." Bright as I had fondly hoped these works would be thought,

they immediately went dark in the face of that undershot jaw with its gleaming white teeth, the drooling lip, and the eager, curious eye on each side of the squat nose, fixed intently upon my quaking self. Whether I continued to read or merely extemporized I do not now recall — in fact, I really never knew — I simply know that I continued to make sounds with my vocal organs, one eye on the pages of my book, the other glued to the lower jaw of the intruder.

The latter, after satisfying his visual perceptions as to my superficial virtues and defects, seemed to find it necessary to satisfy also some inward nasal craving to settle certain lingering doubts in his mind as to my right to be where he found me, and to that end he proceeded to place his squat nose hard up against the calf of my leg, and to sniff vigorously.

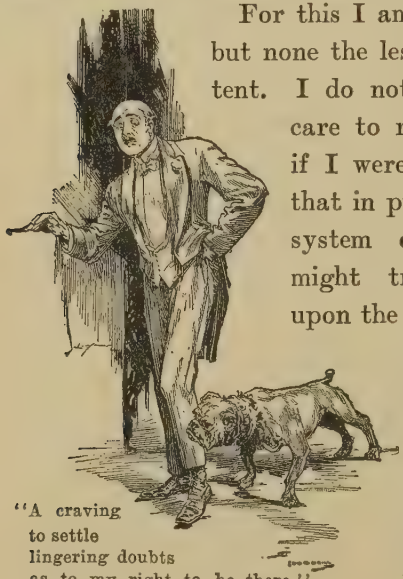
By what strange mercy it was that I did not kick him, then and there, with results that I hesitate even now to dwell upon, I don't know. The supremely important facts are that I did not kick him, but droned quaveringly on through my work, and soon learned happily from a scarcely suppressed snort that he considered me too contempt-

ible for further attention. He departed, going out as he had come, through the open doorway, and left me again in control of the situation, if not wholly of myself. When he had completely faded into the outer darkness I paused and said:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I appreciate deeply your tribute of regard; but let me tell you frankly that I prefer flowers, even vegetables, to bulldogs. If you have any further four-footed tokens of your esteem in store for me, I beg that you will send them by special messenger to my office in New York, or by mail to my residence in Yonkers, the address of which you may secure from the chairman on your way out of the hall at the conclusion of my reading."

The ultimate results of this incident were far from happy. I naturally told the story, together with some other amusing details of my visit to Binghamton, to friends at my club later, not any more in confidence than they are related here, and as good-naturedly as their diverting quality rendered appropriate; and the fact that I had done so coming to certain Binghamtonian ears, I was placarded in one of the Binghamton papers as being "no gentleman," "an ungrateful guest,"

and so on, *ad lib.*, in consequence of which Binghamton and I no longer speak as we pass by.



"A craving to settle lingering doubts as to my right to be there."

For this I am sincerely sorry, but none the less must rest content. I do not think I should care to return there even if I were asked, for fear that in pursuance of their system of tribute they might try my courage upon the lineal descendant of that goat above stairs, or possibly upon some actively inclined bull, playfully unleashed in my vicinity as a test of my composure if not of my good manners.

The minor matter of dress is frequently the cause of emergency calls for help from embarrassed lyceumites, and to get out of predicaments in which mistakes of packing under the pressure of hurry place us sometimes taxes our resources to the uttermost. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once told

me of an amusing complication along these lines by which he was confronted in a New Jersey community, whither he had gone to dine with and address the students of a famous school.

On his arrival at the scene of action Dr. Doyle, as he was then known, discovered to his dismay that in the hurried packing of his suitcase he had forgotten to put in his evening coat. Everything else was there; but his swallowtail was missing. Now Sir Arthur is not only a distinguished novelist and story writer, but is a particularly punctilious and tactfully courteous gentleman as well; and, having heard stories of other Britons coming to this country and attending functions given in their honor in tweeds, as if we Americans knew nothing of the niceties of dress, was careful always to avoid giving offense himself by similar vagaries. So, rather than seem contemptuous of the conventionalities on this occasion, the doctor pleaded a headache as his excuse for not appearing at dinner, and in the interval of time thus gained transformed his blue serge traveling coat into a perfectly good dinner jacket, or Tuxedo, as some do call it, with properly rolling lapels, by cutting off the buttons and rolling the front of his coat back

into a broad lapel effect; pressing the resulting garment into stayable shape by putting it between the mattresses of his bed, and lying on them for an hour.

I cannot say that I have ever found myself master of any such wonderful ingenuity when face to face with a similar predicament; but in Austin, Texas, two years ago I suffered from a condition that for the time being seemed quite as poignantly distressing.

My trunk had been despatched from San Antonio to Houston, and I was "living in my suitcase." With only twenty-five minutes to spare before I was due upon the platform, I found myself without shirt studs, and at the moment without anything at hand to use as an acceptable substitute. A hurried visit to the main street and some of its tributaries divulged nothing in the nature of a haberdashery or a jeweler's shop that had not been closed for the night.

I was in a terrific quandary; but the Only Muse, always a resourceful person, reminded me of Oliver Herford's expedient many years before in using in a similar emergency a set of brass-headed manuscript fasteners. Fortunately I had with

me several bits of manuscript that were held together by these useful little contrivances — small pieces of metal with shining brass caps, backed by flexible flanges to hold the caps in place. These were inserted in the buttonholes of my shirt in most satisfactory fashion, and in a few moments as far as externals were concerned I presented as goodly an appearance as any man rejoicing in the effulgent glory of three lustrously golden studs.

With a sigh of relief I then turned to put on my white waistcoat, only to discover, alas! that that too was missing, nor was there any sign anywhere of any other kind of vest that could do duty convincingly, or even acceptably, with a claw-hammer coat. Again I flew precipitately down the stairs, this time to the kindly room clerk in the hotel office. I explained my predicament to him in a few well chosen words, ending up with:

"Have n't you a white vest you can lend me?"

"Certainly I have," said he, and together we repaired to his room in quest of the needed garment. He soon found it, and I returned rejoicing to my room, the treasure hugged tightly to my breast; but when I came to try it on I discovered, what I had overlooked in the agitation of the mo-

ment, *that as eight is to thirty-two, so was the room clerk's façade to mine!* I could get into the vest; but no compressor ever yet invented could so adjust my physical proportions to the garment that it would come within four inches of meeting in front.

"What the deuce am I going to do?" I cried, sinking into a chair in despair.

"Slit it up the back, and I 'll pin it on you," suggested the ever-ready Muse.

"But it is n't mine," said I.

"Buy it," said she.

In an instant I had the room clerk on the telephone. "Will you sell me that vest?" I asked.

"Why — no," he said. "I don't want to sell it."

"But I need it in my business," I pleaded.

"Well, you 've got it, have n't you?"

"Yes, I 've got it all right," I replied; "*but I can't get into it without putting a yard of extra width in the back.* Come on — be a good fellow and sell it to me," I added with all the pathos that I could summon.

"No," he answered with a chuckle, "no — I

could n't sell it to you; *but I 'll give it to you with all the pleasure in the world!*"

In this fashion was the emergency met, and I went out before my audience that night on time in improvised raiment pinned on to my person, "a thing of shreds and patches," and blazoning as to my shirtfront with all the resplendent gilt of three brass tacks, all of which brought vividly to my mind the words of Antonio in "The Merchant of Venice":

> O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!

It may seem to the casual observer that such matters as shirt studs and white waistcoats are of too slight importance to worry a speaker; but a "whole date" was once saved to me by the fact that I wore a high silk hat, which caused a kindly livery-stable keeper to drive me eighteen miles from a stranded railway train through a blizzard to the town of my destination, because he judged from my hat that *I was a member of a favorite minstrel troupe that was to perform there the same night.* When he discovered that I was only one of "them lecture fellers," for whose free tickets he had no use, he was terribly disappointed.

Anyhow, an audience likes a man to be wholly himself, and cares little for a speaker who modifies his dress according to his ideas of how they wish him to look. A popular and prominent candidate for Governor of New York once lost a large number of votes that might have elected him because in addressing a gathering of workingmen at an East Side rally, the night being insufferably hot, he took off his coat and collar, and spoke to them in his shirt sleeves. The men were deeply offended. They significantly asked if he would have taken off his coat in the presence of a fashionable uptown audience, and would have none of his presumed assumption that they were any less worthy of his respect, or careful of their own dignity, than his so-called smarter, better-class people.

I have always found the full evening dress and high collar of an effete civilization wholly comfortable, and wear them accordingly wherever I lecture, whether it be in the rarefied social atmosphere of high academic circles, or in a mining camp where there dwell possibly rougher, but none the less genuine, human folk. I think that in the latter environment indeed it is a positive aid to success to do so; for there can be no doubt that

reduced to its essentials the evening dress of the modern male creature is really a funny thing, and in an evening devoted somewhat to humor any element that is in even the least degree mirth-provoking does not come amiss.

Perhaps the most overpowering sense of being confronted by an emergency came to me again back in 1898 out of an experience that turned out to be critical only in my own imaginings. Most of our troubles are, I fancy, imaginary — purely psychological, as the modern phrase has it — but while they are on they are none the less acute for all that. On the occasion of which I write, at a more than feverish moment in our relations with Spain and Cuba, I was summoned to lecture at the attractive little port of Brunswick, Georgia. It was here, by the way, that I first had the pleasure of seeing my name on a hotel bill of fare, which in the platform world is the height of fame, just as in the theatrical world it is the acme of distinction for a star to see his name pasted on an ash barrel, or spread across the hoardings of a ten-acre lot full of tin cans and other undesirable bric-à-brac. They had me down on the supper bill among the hot breads, somewhat like this:

HOT BREAD

Tea Biscuit. Corn Muffins. Graham Gems.

Popovers.

John Kendrick Bangs, Casino, To-night.

But that was not the Emergent Moment of which I would speak. This came later, at the conclusion of my lecture, when a young man who in the dim light of the street was scarcely perceptible, intercepted me as I left the hall.

"Mr. Bangs," said he, "I have come here from Captain Maguffy of the *Samuel J. Taylor*, to present his compliments to the skipper of the 'House-Boat on the Styx.' The captain was detained from your lecture to-night, to his very great regret; but he wishes you would drop all formality and join him at supper."

Knowing neither Captain Maguffy (the name is a substitute for the real one) nor his ambassador, I thanked the latter, saying that while I was grateful for his courtesy I was really very tired, had much work ahead of me, and begged to be excused.

"The captain never takes no for an answer," persisted the young man. "He will be terribly disappointed if you don't come, and as a matter

of fact, counting surely upon your good fellowship, he has made special preparations for you."

Unfortunately — or fortunately, as it later turned out — among other serious defects in my education I have never been taught the firmer uses of the negative. I have never been able to say no to anybody as if I really meant it, and it has involved me in more difficulties than I care to record here or elsewhere. In any event, my regrets growing fainter and fainter, and Captain Maguffy's ambassador's insistence more and more marked, the sum total of some thirty-two negatives soon developed into one positive affirmative.

"All right," I said finally, "I 'll run in on the captain; but only for a moment, just long enough to shake hands, say howdido, and get back to bed. I must be in bed by midnight as a matter of principle."

The ambassador thereupon assisted me into one of those indescribable one-horse "shays" that seem to sprout in the vicinity of Southern railway stations and hotels about as lushly as mint in the patches of the Carolinas. I used to think when I was a resident of Yonkers that the Hudson River Valley was a sort of hack heaven, whither all sorts

of deceased vehicles went when they died; but several tours of the South since have convinced me that that idea was mere presumption on my part. The South, as well as the Hudson River Valley, fairly burgeons with vehicular antiques that would delight the soul of an archæologist anxious to find the connecting link between the carriages of the Cæsars and those of Andrew Jackson and his successors up to the merry days of Hayes.

The particular rattledy-bang old combination of wabbling wheels and hair-erupting cushions into which I was ushered was drawn by a white horse, and driven by a colored man. The horse was so very white that it could hardly be seen on the white coquina roads, and the negro was so black that he was equally imperceptible against the background of the night; so that I seemed to be floating through the night enjoying sensations similar to those of a man on his first journey in an aëroplane. The whole effect was eery in the extreme, especially as we drove and drove and drove, and floated and floated and floated, without apparently getting anywhere.

Then, of a sudden, I became terribly uneasy. The thought flashed through my mind, "Why,

here you are, all alone, after ten o'clock at night, in a strange country, going to see a man you never heard of before, in company of an individual whose name you have n't asked, and whose face you have seen only dimly in the dark! You are known to have several hundred dollars in your pocket, and nobody under Heaven but yourself and your companion knows where you are, or in what kind of company." It really seemed time for a diplomatic "hedge."

"Where is Captain Maguffy's house?" I inquired as a starter, after we had driven for an overlong time.

"Newark, New Jersey," was the consoling reply, but soberly made.

"Well — I don't feel equal to a drive that far," I said dryly. "I supposed when I accepted this invitation that your captain was living around the corner somewhere."

"No," said my companion. "*He 's aboard his boat — the Samuel J. Taylor.*"

"His boat?" I cried. "Oh, come now, my friend — if I 'd known that — well, really, I think we 'd better turn back."

"Not now," said he. "We 're almost there."

"But why does n't the captain keep his boat closer to civilization?" I queried. "Is n't there room for him closer to town?"

"Yes, there 's plenty of room closer to town," replied my strange acquaintance, "but the captain prefers to be closer to the sea in case he needs to make a quick get-away. He and the government are n't on the best of terms. Between you and me, he 's *doing a little stunt in filibustering*, and the folks up at Washington are getting suspicious."

My heart sank into my boots and then rebounded to my throat. "You should have told me all this before we started," said I.

"Well, I should have," said he; "but — well, I was afraid if I did you would n't come, and the captain told me not to come back without you. What he says goes with me."

I could think of only one word. The simple term *kidnapped* flashed across my mind, and then the pleasing little phrase, so nice for a headline, *Held for Ransom*, burned itself into my nerve. The beating of my heart sounded like the muffled tread of that invisible steed ahead on the coquina road. I glanced out of the chaise to see what my

chances of escape might be in case I made a break for liberty, and saw off to the right of me the lines of a rotting pierhead, and the towering masts of a huge schooner that was moored to its decaying piling. At the inner end of the pier was a white-washed shed. Everything in sight except the driver, the chaise, and my future looked white — a ghastly, ghostly white that made me think of all the tales of horrid spooks I had ever heard. Here the carriage came to a sudden halt, and a tall black figure loomed up from behind the shed.

"*Did you get him?*" came a deep bass voice out of the night.

"You betcha!" was the reply from my companion.

I descended from the carriage, and my conductor led the way along the rotting stringpiece of the pier, a little more than a foot wide, the chill waters of St. Simon's Sound lapping about six feet below on each side, and the dark figure from behind the shed immediately to the rear. I was completely a captive. A moment later we came to a narrow gangplank leading to the broad, holystoned deck of the schooner, in the fore part of

which was an open hatchway, out of which there streamed a steady shaft of yellow light.

"Down this way, please," said my companion as we reached the hatchway.

Tremulously I followed him down the steps, and in a moment found myself — in the prettiest, daintiest, little, white and gold parlor one could have hoped to find anywhere outside of a mansion designed for a Marie Antoinette, or a Madame de Maintenon! Everywhere was gold and white — chairs, walls, table — and set in the panels of the walls (built in) were a half-dozen exquisite little water-color paintings, all in most perfect keeping with the general color scheme of the room; and on each side of a door leading to an adjoining apartment, impassive as two bits of sculpture, stood two negroes of gigantic size, not an inch under six feet in height — two veritable genii out of the pages of the Arabian Nights, but clad in blue flannel coats with brass buttons, white duck trousers, and glazed white hats with black vizors.

It was really a wonderful picture; but I had hardly had time to take it in when from behind me again the bass voice of the figure behind the shed broke upon my hearing.

"Welcome, O Skipper of the Stygian House Boat, to the *Samuel J. Taylor!*" it said, and quickly turning I found myself gazing into the dark, flashing eyes of my host. If the white and gold cabin had amazed me, the captain completely took my breath away. He looked as if he had just come in from a five o'clock tea on Fifth avenue — frock coat, dark gray trousers, all of perfect fit, white waistcoat, lavender tie with an exquisite pearl pin stuck carelessly into its soft folds, and in his hand the very latest thing in imported high silk hats! He was the beau ideal of your conventional gentleman of society. As I have said, I was breathless, and consequently speechless, for a moment; but I did manage at the end of a few seconds to blurt out:

"Am I — am I awake, Captain?"

"Well — if you 're not, we 've plenty of room and time for you to sleep it out," he replied.

"But this cabin — this saloon — these — these water colors!" I went on.

"A little fancy of my wife's," said mine host. "She fitted it all up herself. The water colors, by the way, are all her own work. Rather nice, I think. She was a pupil of a fellow Centurion of

yours, Mr. ——." Here he mentioned one of our famous artists, a member of my club, and a painter of rare distinction.

My desire to get away had become less keen; but I deemed it wise nevertheless to make the effort. I still needed some reassurance as to my safety.

"Well, Captain," said I, "it has been a pleasure to meet you, and I hate to run; but I have had a hard day of it, and I 'm very tired. I have come just to shake hands with you and say howdido, before turning in for the night."

"Oh, you must n't go until you have broken bread with me," said he.

"I told him he could be in bed by twelve if he wanted to," interposed my conductor.

"All right," said the captain. "We 'll live up to your promise. You may serve the supper at once," he added, turning to the two genii at the door, who had not stirred a muscle through the whole conversation.

Then began the service of a supper in which for the first time I tasted the joys of alligator pears, the sweets of real grapefruit made into salad, the full possibilities of Moro crabs à la Newburg, alongside of which even my beloved Maine lobsters

are dull and dreary reptiles, and of many other delightful edibles as well, with my choice of a liquid refreshment as if from the cellar of a Lucullus — and through it all the captain talked.

He told me of his interest in the Cuban struggle for independence; how he had gone first to Havana as correspondent for an American newspaper with a decided leaning toward Spanish interests; how he had resigned rather than write the kind of material his chiefs demanded.

He told me then how he had at last decided to help the Cuban cause with arms, and with what money he had; how he had chartered this lumber schooner and gone ostensibly into the lumber business to cover his real activities; and how every time he set out from Brunswick laden with lumber consigned to some other port he always took time to run over to Cuban waters, and carry weapons and ammunition to the insurgents.

"And what has Uncle Sam had to say to all these activities?" I asked.

"He 's getting a little suspicious," laughed the captain. "Once I thought he 'd got me, too. I had a thousand rifles and ten thousand rounds of ammunition in hand for the boys, the other day

and while I was being towed out to sea by a tug the *Vesuvius*, which had been watching me for several days, fired a shot across my bows and stopped me. They sent a search party aboard — and I tell you, sir, they were a mighty thorough lot! There was n't a nook or cranny of the *Samuel J. Taylor* those fellows did n't turn inside out. Not an inch from topmast to keel escaped the official eye; but they found nothing, and I was allowed to go on."

"But how," said I, "did you manage to conceal the stuff?"

"Oh, that was simple," laughed the captain. "They went through the *Samuel J. Taylor* with a fine-tooth comb; *but they forgot to search the tug.* We transferred the guns later, and forty-eight hours afterward they were in the hands of the Cubans."

It was five o'clock in the morning when Captain Maguffy delivered me at my hotel.

"Good-by, Captain," said I. "For a few moments I was afraid you were going to kidnap me — and now, by George! my only regret is *that you did n't!*"

He laughed heartily. "Well," he said, "if you

really mean that, come back on board. *I think it can be arranged.*"

But freedom was too sweet, and besides I had to make my living; so I reluctantly bade the captain good morning, and have thought of him affectionately ever since.

XVI

A PIONEER MANAGER

NO record made by a grateful pen of the joys and trials of the lecture platform could be complete without some reference to the spiritual benefits made possible by the profession of "Gad and Gab," as Mr. Strickland Gillilan, the astute author of "Off Ag'in, On Ag'in, Finnigin," himself a happy worker in the vineyard of peripatetic eloquence, calls it, in the matter of friendships. Both as a producer and as a consumer of the platform product I have been the beneficiary of many friendships and acquaintances that I now hold among the cherished memories of my professional life. As I think of them now they rush in upon me with such tidal force that I find myself unable for lack of space to treat of them in this volume, and they must be left for other pages. And yet in the light of grateful reasoning it becomes clear that I should not close this portion of my story with-

out some reference to one splendid soul, to whom primarily I owe all the happiness in this line of human effort that it has been my privilege and my blessing to enjoy, James B. Pond — the good old major, who during his long and busy career as an organizer and manager was guide, mentor, and friend, always faithful, always true, to the Man on the Platform. He was a big man in every way, physically as well as spiritually. The only misfit about him, if there were any, perhaps was in the size of his heart, which was, I suspect, too large even for his gigantic frame. If any man was ever born to be a pioneer in any kind of human endeavor requiring tenacity of purpose, scrupulous integrity, courage in the face of trial, tolerance of the shortcomings of others, and a dogged insistence upon "quality," that man was Major Pond, and he looked it.

If I were a painter, and wanted a model for one of those sturdy Americans who were not afraid of anything, and went out into the wilds of a new and dangerous country with all the zest of a boy on the trail of a fox, to hew by main strength a way that civilization might follow in his train, I should seek no further than that huge, strengthful

figure, massive, graceful even in its ungainliness, surmounted by the frank, vigorous, hewn face that from its deep-set eyes flashed determination and kindliness always. Somehow or other Major Pond always made me think of the days of Forty-nine, and when he first dawned, or I should perhaps better say loomed, on the horizon of my life, I began first to sense the smallness of a mere library as a world in which to live, and to think of those vast, remoter stretches where men did not read and write romances, but lived them.

My first contact with Major Pond was as a consumer of the things he had to sell, and I came soon to learn that the stamp of his approval was the hallmark of excellence. The major's imprint upon a circular was enough for me, and in several years of our relation as buyer and seller he never failed me; and the merest cursory glance at the list of men and women for whom he stood sponsor in the lyceum field shows why. It was a marvelous galaxy of humans, many of them now passed imperishably into the pages of history, for whom the major did yeoman service in this country, beginning with Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and Henry Ward Beecher, and ending with Mat-

thew Arnold, Henry M. Stanley, Julia Ward Howe and that Prince among men, the never-to-be-forgotten John Watson, dear to the hearts of readers everywhere as Ian Maclaren.

The service of the manager of the Major Pond type was not a mere perfunctory business service only, but was of a more or less intimate personal nature as well. The major was not content to make a booking for a celebrity at some distant, well nigh inaccessible point, and then shoot him out into the dark unknown to take care of himself, and get along as best he might. On the contrary, he went along himself when he could, and what hardships were to be faced he shared, and those that might be staved off by a little kindly care and foresight he shielded his people from. It was thus that he built up not only the most notable list of lecturers the world has yet known, but at the same time surrounded himself with a circle of gallant friends, who came to think of him with rare affection.

This intimate personal contact with men of unusual distinction gave him a fund of reminiscence that was a never-failing source of delight to his friends. To Mr. Gladstone, Pond's stories were

so tremendously appealing that during one of the major's visits to London the great British statesman requested permission to have a stenographer take them down just as they fell from the lips of the picturesque old American. Concerning Henry Ward Beecher and Mark Twain the major could talk forever, and the little sidelights his fund of anecdote concerning them cast upon the personality of these two men were invariably appealing.

Worn by the nervous strain of a hard bit of lecturing before the major's own friends and neighbors one night many years ago, I was privileged to sit and gather refreshment and peace of mind in the joy of one of the major's reminiscent monologues lasting well into the early hours of the morning, with which he regaled me upon my return to his hospitable house. I was unhappily conscious of not having done my work particularly well that night — in fact I had had to lecture from a manuscript, which is always fatiguing both to speaker and to audience, and I hardly dared ask the major what he thought of my performance — but after awhile in his fatherly way he broached the subject himself.

"It was a good lecture, Bangs," he said, "and

some day, maybe, you *will find time to make it shorter.*"

"What is a good lecture, Major, anyhow?" I asked, hoping that from such an authority as he must by now have become I should get some clue to a possible short cut, if not to success, at least away from failure.

He threw himself back in his chair and laughed. "That reminds me, Bangs," said he. "Maybe you 'd like to know what Horace Greeley considered a good lecture — at any rate it is the only answer to your question that I know. Greeley and Henry Ward Beecher and I were on our way to Boston once, and as we passed through Bridgeport, Connecticut, Greeley, glancing out of the car window, said, 'Hello, here 's Bridgeport, the home of P. T. Barnum! Nice town, Beecher. I gave a successful lecture here once.'

"'What do you call a successful lecture, Greeley?' asked Mr. Beecher.

"'Why,' said Greeley, '*a successful lecture is where more people stay in than go out.*'"

As for the major's relations with Mark Twain, there was always so much of the spirit of prank-some boyhood in them both that their days to-

gether, when Clemens was so bravely working to clear off the indebtedness of the publishing house that he had unnecessarily but chivalrously assumed as his own, must have been something of a romp, despite the unquestioned hardships of such persistent travel.

As a specimen of the playful spirit in which the two men went at their work I recall a story told me that night by the major of how in a far western State, owing to a delayed train, they were kept waiting on a railway station platform for several hours.

"Look here, Pond!" said Clemens after much dreary waiting. "You may not know it, but this is a violation of our contract. You agreed to keep me traveling, and this ain't traveling: it's just nothing but pure, cussed condemned loafing!"

"All right, Mark," said the major. "Just a second and I'll fix you out."

The major walked up to the end of the platform, where there was an empty baggage truck standing in front of the baggage room door. This he pushed along to where Clemens was standing, and then picking the humorist up in his arms he

put him on board the truck and wheeled him up and down the platform, to the astonishment of the gathered natives, until the train came in, thus filling his contract to the letter, as was his invariable custom.

Nor shall I ever forget the major's delightful characterization of the platform work of Matthew Arnold.

"Arnold spoke from a manuscript," said he. "It was a printed affair, done in large letters on ordinary cap paper, and bound up in a portfolio. This he insisted on having on an easel at his right hand. After bowing to his audience he would fasten his eyes on the manuscript and then turn and recite a sentence from it to the people in front. Then he would go back to the manuscript again, corral another sentence, and recite that. *And so it went to the end of the show — and all in a voice that nobody could hear!*"

The major paused a moment, and chuckled.

"General and Mrs Grant attended the first Arnold lecture at Chickering Hall," he said. "The place was packed; but I got them seats, well back, but the best there were. After Arnold's lips had been moving without a sign of a word that

anybody could hear for ten or fifteen minutes the General turned to Mrs. Grant and said, 'Well, my dear, we 've *seen* the British Lion at least; but inasmuch as we cannot hear him roar I guess we 'd better go home!' Grant was known as the silent man," continued the major; "but Arnold gave him a pointer on how a man could be silent and talking at the same time."

The major was a great believer in the value of Author's Readings by what he used to call "running mates," —teams, as the vaudevillains have it. He had had great success with such combinations as Mark Twain and George W. Cable, Thomas Nelson Page and F. Hopkinson Smith, and Bill Nye and James Whitcomb Riley. Trotting in double harness had proved in these cases most profitable for everybody concerned, and the major was constantly in search of new alliances. How his ordinarily sane judgment ever came to be warped to such point that he could think of me in such a connection I cannot even pretend to surmise; but it did happen that in the mid-nineties of the last century he began singing a siren song in my ears, to which in an hour of greed and weakness I yielded, the burden of whose refrain was that

R. K. Munkittrick of Puck, a man with a rare gift of buoyant humor, and I could make a fortune for everybody if we would only consent to "trot" together.

I had no particular illusions as to my abilities; but the fact that Major Pond believed I could do it was enough for me. If the Gaekwar of Baroda should ever assure me that a cracked bit of Pittsburg plate glass was a diamond of fairest ray serene, I should be inclined to think there was something in it so long as he was n't trying to sell it to me, and so when Major Pond was willing to stake his professional reputation on it that Munkittrick and I would make a highly acceptable platform constellation it was not for me to refuse to twinkle.

I shall never forget the experience. The horrors of it were such that the Day of Judgment itself have possessed small terrors for me since. We were tried out at Albany, New York, before an audience of sixty people, in an auditorium capable of seating three thousand. Everything seemed to go wrong, and on our way up to Albany Munkittrick managed to catch a cold which left him terribly hoarse upon our arrival at the old Delavan

House in New York's capital city. To overcome this hoarseness Munkittrick bought a box of troches of a well known brand, but instead of taking one or two of them he devoured the whole box in about twenty minutes, as if they had been gumdrops or marshmallows, with the result that his tongue began to swell up, and by eight o'clock when we were due on the platform that essential factor of clarity of enunciation was "too big for the job," if I may so put it, occupying not less than seven-eighths of the available space inside of Munkittrick's mouth, all of which, combined with the natural nervousness of a début, put us quite out of commission.

As a matter of fact we should never have gone out upon the platform; but we did, and while the chairman was announcing to the scattered multitude in front that we were the greatest combination of wit, eloquence, and humor the world had ever known, not even excepting Nye and Riley, who had so often delighted Albany audiences in the past, Munkittrick and I sat there quivering with fear, not even daring to look at each other. I do not believe that even the Babes in the Wood themselves looked upon their prospects with

greater dread. It was an awful evening; so awful that before it was over a frivolous reaction set in which I truly think was the only thing that enabled us to push it through to the bitter end.

Of course it was a failure. We knew that almost before we began; but it was borne in upon us at the end by the fact that the chairman, who had invited us to join him in a little supper afterward to meet a few of his friends, vanished as if the earth had opened up and swallowed him, and not a crumb of his supper or the hem of his garment did either of us ever see again. Fortunately we had been paid in cash before we went out upon the stage. If it had not been so, or had we been paid by a check on which payment could have been stopped, I doubt if either of us would have realized a penny on the transaction. Moreover, I did not venture to call upon the major for at least a week, and even then my meeting with him was merely casual. I bumped against him on the street in front of his office in the Everett House.

"Hello, Bangs!" said he. "Have a good time at Albany?"

"Fine!" said I. "The town is full of charming people."

"Well — I 'm *glad somebody enjoyed it,*" said the major.

"Any more bookings?" said I.

"No," said the major, with a far-away look in his eye. "Fact is, old man, times are sort o' hard, and after thinking the matter over I 've decided that I guess we 'd better put off our drive for new business until — well, *until some other season.*"

And that was all the chiding I received from that kindly soul!

Several years elapsed before I resumed professional relations with Major Pond, and the incident that brought about that resumption has always seemed to me to be most amusing, and to bring out in vivid colors the quality of the major's temper. Indeed it was about as illuminating a little farce-comedy as one would care to see.

It happened that somewhere about the beginning of this century I was invited to prepare for a New York newspaper syndicate a series of satirical biographies of prominent personages of the day. The series was called "Who 's What and Why in America." I was doing a great deal of other work at the time, and the managers of the syndicate fell in readily with my expressed view that lest my

name should seem to appear too frequently, and in too many competing quarters, it would be best that for this venture I should use a pseudonym. I therefore did the work over the pen name of Wilberforce Jenkins. The series was very well received, and for over a year was one of the most popular syndicate features running, as a result of which Wilberforce Jenkins began to receive a great many letters from a great many people — so many as almost to make me personally jealous of his growing fame. Among other communications received was one from Major Pond, which ran somewhat like this:

New York, March 12, 1901.

WILBERFORCE JENKINS, Esq.

Dear Sir.— I have been reading with a great deal of interest your sparkling biographies of the Men of To-day in the New York "Blank." I don't want to flatter you, but you have more real humor in your thumb than all the rest of the funny men of the day rolled into one have in their million and a half fingers. Have you ever considered the desirability of using your gifts on the lecture platform? If you have, let me know. If you can talk half as well as you write, you will be a winner. Come and see me some day and talk it over. I think we can do business together.

Very truly yours, JAMES B. POND.

The situation was too rich to neglect, and I resolved to have a little innocent fun with the major.

I repaired almost immediately to the telephone and rang him up. The connection made, I inquired:

"Is this Major Pond?"

"Yes," was the reply. "Who are you?"

"Major J. B. Pond of the Pond Lyceum Bureau?" I continued.

"Yes, I'm Major Pond. Who's this talking?" he answered.

"I am Wilberforce Jenkins, the Who's What and Why man, Major," said I.

"Well — say, old man," said he, with a pleasant touch of enthusiasm in his voice, "I'm mighty glad to hear from you. That's A-1 stuff you are running in the *Blank*. Did you get my letter?"

"Yes," said I. "That's why I am ringing you up."

"Good!" said he. "Ready to talk turkey, are you?"

"Well — I don't know about that, Major," said I hesitatingly. "Of course I know who you are, and the kind of things you do; but — well, to be quite frank with you, I don't know whether I want to do business with you or not."

"Oh!" said the major. "That's it, is it? Well — what seems to be the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much," said I. "Only I was talking with a man about you the other day, and from one or two things he said —"

"What did he say?" the major blurted out.

"Well, to begin with, he said you were an old palaverer," said I. "He intimated that there was a good deal of what you might call hatwork in the quality of your conversation. He said he 'd done business with you once, and while he liked you personally you were not all you seemed to think you were as an impresario."

"Who the deuce ever told you that?" demanded the major. "You say he did business with me once?"

"So he said," said I. "And he was pretty outspoken about it too. He told me his tour with you was a rank failure."

"I 'd like to know his name," said the major, and I could almost hear the dear old gentleman biting into the wire.

"Well, I guess he would n't mind my telling," said I. "There was n't anything particularly confidential about our talk. His name is Bangs — John Kendrick Bangs."

My name came back at me over the wire like an

explosion of dynamite. "*Bangs!*" retorted the major. "Good Lord — *Bangs!* Does he call a trip up to Albany and back a tour? *I guess he was a failure!* I can tell you things about Bangs as a platform performer that 'll show you mighty quick whose failure it was, and if you want to bring him along to hear what I have to say on that subject, *bring him.* The idea! My Heavens, old man — why, he —"

"Oh, never mind all that, Major," said I. "I 'm only telling you what he said. I don't have to take it all as gospel truth, you know."

"Well I guess not!" snorted the major.

"Now I 'm very busy these days," I continued, "and I really have n't got time to go to your office; but if you will take lunch with me to-morrow at the Century Club, about one o'clock, we can talk this thing over."

"I 'll be there," said the major. "One o'clock sharp, and meanwhile if you run across J. K. tell him with my compliments that he can go to thunder. *Tour!* I like that!"

"All right, Major," said I. "Don't fail me."

And there our telephone conversation closed. The following morning I arranged at the club to

have the major ushered into the reception room in case he called and asked for Wilberforce Jenkins, and as the hour approached I lingered around to see the fun.

Faithful to the minute the major arrived at one o'clock, inquired for Mr. Jenkins, and was requested to wait in the reception room, since Mr. Jenkins had not yet come in. After he had been sitting there for about five minutes I decided that the time for action had arrived; so I walked into the reception room myself.

"Why — hello, Major!" said I, as cordially as I really felt. "How are you these days?"

"I 'm all right," he said coldly, ignoring my outstretched hand.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

"I don't know that that 's any of your business, Bangs," said he, bridling up; "but I don't mind telling you that I 've come to meet a man who when it comes to writing real humor has got you skinned eight billion miles."

"Good!" said I. "Who is this eighth wonder of the world?"

"His name," said Major Pond, "is Wilberforce Jenkins."

"Oh, Lord!" said I. "That faker? Well, I am at least glad to know what your standards of humor are."

"*Faker?*" retorted the major. "You seem to have some gift for saying nice things about your friends, Bangs," he added witheringly.

"Friends?" said I, with a laugh of scorn. "You don't call that idiot Wilberforce Jenkins a friend of mine, do you? You must think I let myself go pretty cheap."

"Well, he seemed to think you were a friend of his — at least he told me so — but of course a man may be mistaken in respect to that," he observed significantly.

"Well, don't you believe a word he says, Major," said I. "I know Wilberforce Jenkins all the way through, and he and truth aren't upon speaking terms. You say he has invited you here to meet him?"

"To take lunch with him," said the major.

"Well of all the pure unmitigated *nerve!*" said I. "That shows you what sort of fellow Jenkins is. Why, Major, *he isn't even a member here!* He has a ten-day card from me; but that doesn't entitle him to invite you or anybody else here.

You 'd better come upstairs and have lunch with me."

"I 'll starve first!" said the major.

"Oh, all right," said I. "If you won't, you won't; but I 'll bet you five dollars right now that Wilberforce Jenkins does n't come!"

"I don't bet," said the major. "I gave up gambling after that *tour* of yours up to Albany and back. It does n't pay."

I retired to a writing table at one end of the room, and pretended to be busy at letter writing for some ten or fifteen minutes, keeping one sly eye on the major the while. He was visibly chafing. Now and then he would take out his watch, and gaze intently into its telltale face. Then he would rise and inspect the pictures on the walls. When half-past one came and there was no Wilberforce Jenkins in sight his patience was manifestly near its end, and regarding that as the psychological moment I again approached him.

"'*He cometh not, she said,*'" I quoted in my most plaintive tones. "And what 's more, Major, he won't never be here. He never kept a promise or an engagement in his life. Come along — change your mind and take lunch with me."

"*I would n't lunch with you if* —" he began.

And then I burst out laughing. I could not carry the farce a bit further. "Major," said I, "the reason why I know all about this Wilberforce Jenkins and his general unreliability is very simple — *I am Wilberforce Jenkins myself.*"

The old gentleman gasped. His face was a study for a moment, and then with a great laugh he sprang to his feet, and seized me by the arm. "Here, Bangs," he said, "get your hat and come along with me! We 'll eat at Delmonico's."

"But you said just now you would n't take lunch with me," I protested.

"Yes, but by Simeon," he retorted, "*I never said that you would n't take lunch with me,* and by the Eternal *you 'll come or I 'll carry you!*"

And the only hatchet that ever threatened our friendship was buried on the instant.

Major Pond was indeed a rare and a loyal spirit. He always credited James Redpath with being the Father of the Modern Lyceum, and perhaps he was right. The Modern Lyceum owes much to James Redpath; but as for me I prefer to award its paternal honors to Major Pond. His interest in it, and his affectionate attitude toward

those he helped along its sometimes rugged path, were too strictly fatherly to warrant any lesser title at the hands of one of its most grateful sons.

THE END

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